The Ethic of Pluralism in the Qur'ān and the Prophet's Medina

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TO MY
FATHER AND MOTHER

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis deals with (1) the idea of pluralism in the Qur'ān – that humanity's diverse communities are to co-exist and co-operate, and that no single group has a monopoly on 'salvation'; and (2) the practice of pluralism in the Prophet's Medina, wherein different religious groups were part of the *ummah*, 'community of believers'. This thesis will contend that pluralism is central to the Qur'ān's vision for society as cooperative and inclusive, as exemplified in such verses as 2:62, 49:13, and 5:48. The Qur'ānic doctrine of pluralism – buttressed by the notion of the commonality of humanity – influenced the Prophet's public policy, especially his actions and relations with other communities. This is seen especially in the 'Constitution of Medina', through which the Prophet aimed to establish a unified 'community of believers' (*ummah*) that included different religious groups, like Muslims and Jews.

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RÉSUMÉ

Auteur : Mohammad N. Miraly
Titre: L'éthique du pluralisme dans le Coran (Qur'ān) et la Médina du Prophète
Départment: Institute des Études Islamiques, Université McGill
Diplôme: Maîtrise des Arts

Cette thèse traite de (1) l'idée du pluralisme dans le Coran c'est à dire que les diverses communités doivent co-exister et coopérer et qu'aucun groupe à lui seul ne doit avoir le monopole sur le salut; et (2) la pratique du pluralisme dans la Médina du Prophète de par laquelle diverses groupes religieux faisaient partie du *ummah,* « communauté de croyants ». Cette thèse soutiendra que le pluralisme est un concept central dans la vision du Coran d'une société coopérative et inclusive, tel qu'illustré dans des passages tels que 2:62. 49 :13 et 5 :48. La doctrine Coranique du pluralisme – appuyée par le concept de la communauté de l'humanité - a influencé les politiques publiques du Prophète, surtout ses actes et ses relations avec d'autres communautés. Ceci est particulièrement apparent dans la « Constitution de Medina », à travers laquelle le Prophète avait pour but d'établir une « communauté de croyants » *(ummah)* unifiée qui inclurait différents groupes religieux, tels que les juifs et les musulmans.

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To my parents and grandparents I owe the most. It is due solely to their provisions of love and guidance that I persist in my endeavours, and that I defer all praise to God, the ultimate object of my gratitude and strivings.

To those whom I have failed to mention here, I apologise. Those who have been mentioned here have played a great part in the culmination of this study, but none at all in its shortcomings.

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The Qur'ān recognizes and promotes diversity by proclaiming to the Prophet Muḥammad that if God had willed 'He would have made you [all] a single people' (Q. 5:48).[1] But, humankind was made into 'nations and tribes' so that they may come to 'know one another' (Q. 49:13).[2] Thus, the Qur'ān encourages individuals to come to know people, both Muslim and non-Muslim, who believe differently from themselves, and to 'vie with one another in good works' (Q. 5:48).[3] This fraternal ethic is rooted in the Qur'ānic notion of a common humanity, which stresses that all humans, regardless of ideological persuasion, were created 'from a single soul' (Q. 4:1)[4] and thus have within them the spark of the Divine. It matters not, then, whether one is a Jew, or a Christian, or a Sabaean, since whoever does right 'shall have their reward with their Lord' (Q. 2:62).[5] Indeed, 'the noblest' among people, says the Qur'ān, 'is the best in conduct' (Q. 49:13).[6]

The Qur'ān thus decrees that humankind's judgment depends on its righteousness, not its allegiance to this or that creed. Righteousness, as expounded in Sura 25, is not in the province of religious obligation, but, rather, propagates through social action – the best way to serve God is to serve humankind, to whom the rest of creation has been entrusted (Q. 33:72). Effectively, then, the call for social justice was the foundation of an inclusive *ummah*

[1] Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The holy Qur'ān: Arabic text with an English translation and commentary* (Delhi: Kitab Pub. House, 1973). Available online at the University of Southern California's USC-MSA Compendium of Muslim Texts website: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/>.
[2] Marmaduke Pickthall, *The glorious Koran: a bi-lingual edition with English translation, introduction and notes* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976). Also available online at <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/>.
[3] Pickthall translation.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Yusuf Ali translation.
[6] Pickthall translation.

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('community of believers') composed of diverse and different human beings conjoined by the Adamic ethic of the dual human responsibility to ennoble both Self and Society.

It is from within this *Weltanschauung* that issued the Qur'ān's pronouncements towards the 'other'. The Qur'ānic worldview unfolded gradually; it took into account Muḥammad's interactions with the 'other', and their responses to his preaching and presence (hence the Revelation's seeming contradictoriness). What is underscored here is that the Qur'ān was, indeed, a 'living' text. A full appreciation of the Qur'ānic message, then, depends on a holistic understanding of the scriptural and historical contexts of the instances of revelation. 'It is only by completely disregarding the original historical contexts of revelation,' writes Harvard University's Ali Asani, 'that the exclusivist Muslim exegetes have been able to counteract the pluralist ethos that so thoroughly pervades the Quran.'[7]

Typically, religions and their scriptures have been interpreted in different times and spaces to produce often contradictory political or social readings. The same is true for Islam and the Qur'ān. The basic contention of this present work is that the Qur'ān's *overall orientation* is toward the promotion of a pluralist society – harmony of existence between diverse peoples. However, throughout the centuries, the Qur'ān has been co-opted to render anti-pluralist, or exclusivist, interpretations in order to advance hegemonic political or religious goals.[8] With the proper consideration of historical contexts, then, what appears is a universalist message whose aim is to establish amidst humankind's diversity a justice and unity that reflects on Earth the divine qualities of *'Adl* (Justice) and *Tawḥīd* (Unity).

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[7] Ali S. Asani, 'On Pluralism, Intolerance, and the Quran,' *The American Scholar*, 72:1 (Winter 2002), 59. Available online at <http://www.twf.org/Library/Pluralism.html>.
[8] Ibid., 57ff.

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PLURALISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

'Pluralism'[9] – the promotion of diverse groups in one society – is a word that conjures a multitude of meanings and implications. Indeed, it is precisely because of its meaningful implications that it is an interesting and poignant subject of study. Such implications, however, will not be addressed in this present work. Rather, the intent of this present work is to showcase the Qur'ānic doctrine of pluralism so that both the Muslim and non-Muslim reader can overcome the often predominant conception of religion as exclusivist; it is hoped, furthermore, that the reader will come to appreciate the Qur'ān's irenicism, which, as will be contended in this study, is its intrinsic disposition. It is also hoped that this present study will bring clarity to the issue of pluralism and thereby unburden policy-makers in the Muslim world of the sometimes prevailing belief that Islam does not advocate or allow pluralism.

Even though its modern implications will not be discussed in this present study, the reader should nevertheless be aware of the importance and relevance of pluralism. The concept has become enormously popular in our present times, since it is widely urged as the means to mitigate conflict between and among our globe's increasingly interacting identities: when individuals and societies are able to coexist cooperatively, the misconceptions and fears that lead to conflict are allayed. In a world in which over ninety percent of states are multi-identity in nature, inter-group cooperation – as well as the creation of common bonds – has grave implications for human survival. To ignore the modern fact of diversity is to risk the type of conflict that has occurred between the Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, or the Hindus and Muslims in India, or the blacks and whites in the United States

[9] Pluralism is: the valuing of human diversity to the extent that it promotes the existence and promulgation of various internal groups and their differing ethnic, religious, or political backgrounds within one society. The term is defined more fully in the opening of Chapter One.

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and South Africa, or the Tamils and Sinhalas in Sri Lanka, or the Shī'a and Sunnī in Pakistan.[10]

Among most of today's approximately forty Muslim-majority countries – which are located in what is called the developing world – interactions between varied cultures and religions have increased dramatically. These countries evince a low level of economic and social development, are subject to political oppression, and lack the necessary administrative, legal, and economic mechanisms to sustain properly functioning political and civic systems. This is a problem that is not limited to the Muslim world, however, and is a function of post-colonial and post-Cold War politics, which left many countries (like Afghanistan and Angola) in a debilitated state, forced to cobble new administrative and legal mechanisms that had no basis in any pre-existing or indigenous systems from which local principles or values could be drawn. The consequence of these confused circumstances has been painfully evident across the globe in the form of weak rules of law, the result of which has been destructive conflicts, the breakdown of civic culture, and the persecution of minorities.

The restructuring of these societies – indeed, self-sustainable restructuring in general – is dependent entirely on the level of cooperation of the various internal groups. It is by embracing pluralism – and its attendant civic culture – as an essential civic building block that they will emerge successfully as partners in the global system. Pluralist societies are the product of good governance and sound public policy that both acknowledge and support diversity. The political and economic benefits of a society based on a pluralist ethic are obvious: with enhanced inter-group cooperation, governments are able to build loyalty and mobilize networks of support for their citizenry. Such stability, in turn, leads to a positive

[10] Ashutosh Varshney, 'Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond,' *World Politics* 53 (April 2001), 365.

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and thriving economic environment (a requisite for any strong civil society) as well as accountable government. Thus, the study of pluralism is integral to the positive development of modern human societies.

It is these wider implications for pluralism that has made it so modish today. For Muslim societies, as mentioned already, the pluralist project promises positive progress in important fields like economics, law, politics, and culture; this is perhaps why many modern scholars call attention to pluralism in the Qur'ān and Islam. But, this is not a novel or anachronistic reading of the Scripture or the religion. In fact, what is contended throughout this work is that pluralism is intrinsic to the Qur'ān, and that it played a central role in the Qur'ānic vision, which the Prophet spent the last twenty years of his life trying to actualize.

That pluralism is found and emphasized in the Qur'ān today more than it was in the past is indicative of modern sensibilities, not the Qur'ān's essential sensibilities. It is in light of the drastic financial crises, demographic disruption, and agricultural stagnation experienced by all the major Muslim polities from the eighteenth century to the present that many modern Muslims have come to view the pluralist project as an effective and positive means to restructure their societies; thus, the modern emphasis on pluralism and Islam. Nevertheless, if the Qur'ān's emphasis on pluralism went unnoticed in the centuries after the Scripture's revelation, it is because it was willfully ignored.[11] To be sure, the Prophet knew of it, and, like him, *we* cannot afford to ignore it.

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[11] To supplement Asani's comments above: Farid Esack writes (*Qur'ān, Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997), 147): '[...] traditionalist and conservative scholars have resorted to what can only be described as forced linguistic and exegetical exercises to compel inclusivist texts to produce exclusivist meanings.' This issue will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

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STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis addresses (1) the idea of pluralism in the Qur'ān – that humanity's diverse communities are to co-exist and co-operate, and that no single group has a monopoly on 'salvation'; and (2) the practice of pluralism in the Prophet's Medina, wherein different religious groups were part of the *ummah* ('community of believers').

The originality of this study is its emphasis on the Qur'ān's role in propounding pluralism as a doctrine of Islam and a policy of Muḥammad. While other works have been produced about Qur'ānic pluralism, such discussions fall usually within the context of modern political science. This present thesis will present pluralism as a Qur'ānic doctrine buttressed on the notion of a common humanity – a doctrine that influenced and motivated the Prophet's public policy. Many critics state that it is anachronistic to suggest that the Prophet and the Qur'ān promoted pluralism. However, though the word may be modern, the idea of a cooperative and inclusive human society is fundamental to the Qur'ānic worldview. This and other critiques of Islam and pluralism will be discussed in Chapter One.

The primary contention of this thesis is that pluralism is central to the Qur'ān's vision for society; this is exemplified by verses such as 2:62, 49:13, and 5:48. Chapter Two will discuss the Qur'ān's basis for pluralism as based on the notion of an essential unity between humans. It will showcase the Qur'ānic ethic of pluralism; and discuss the issue of violence (especially toward the 'People of the Book'), as well as the concept of abrogation, a much-debated tool which has produced exclusivist readings of the Text.

Chapter Three will discuss how the Qur'ān's notions of pluralism influenced the Prophet's actions and relations with other communities. It will showcase the role of the

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'Constitution of Medina'[12] as an illustration of the Prophet's pluralist policies. Even though the Prophet eventually established a nascent 'polity' at Medina, Qur'ānic precepts and socio-moral principles shaped his outlook. Thus, the Qur'ān's vision of a cooperative and inclusive human society influenced the Prophet's policies. The focus of Chapter Three will therefore be: (1) that the Prophet linked his message to those of all human communities by identifying himself with previous prophets as well as the primordial religion of Abraham (Q. 16:123), and (2) the inclusion of the Jews in the *ummah* of Medina, which was certified by Qur'ān 21:92 and articulated in Article 25 (and 26-31) of the Constitution of Medina. The Constitution of Medina is therefore an important illustration of how the Qur'ān's pluralist ethos influenced Muḥammad's policies and ideas.

Finally, the concluding chapter will comment on the main argument of the thesis, as well as include a brief discussion of modern exclusivism and its close relationship to politics. Certainly, this is a complicated discussion that lies beyond the scope of the present study, but it is offered for the reader who may wonder why – if indeed the Qur'ān promotes pluralism – Islam is oftentimes perceived as exclusivist in modern times, and what can be done to recapture the Qur'ān's ethic of pluralism to effect positive change in the present day.

LITERATURE SURVEY

This thesis examines two aspects of pluralism: one as reflected in the Qur'ānic statements, the other as manifested in the Prophet's actions and practices in Medina. Prominent Western scholars – such as W. Montgomery Watt[13] and Marshall G. S. Hodgson[14] (Karen

[12] See Appendix: The Constitution of Medina.
[13] Watt is an English Islamic scholar. His *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956) is most important to this study.
[14] Hodgson was an Islamic scholar and a world historian at the University of Chicago. His most famous and influential work is *The venture of Islam: conscience and history in a world civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

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Armstrong's[15] position is the same) – do not discuss the Qur'ān's idea of pluralism, and treat the inclusiveness of Muḥammad's policies cursorily. Scholars such as Fazlur Rahman,[16] Frederick M. Denny,[17] and Dale Eickelman,[18] however, address the issue of pluralism directly, and contend that it is a doctrine central to the Qur'ānic vision for humanity. Thus, what appears are two quite different readings of early Islamic history.

Most Western scholars present Muḥammad's actions as largely political and place less emphasis on the Qur'ān's influencing of those actions. However (and on this score most scholars would agree), the Qur'ān's influence on Muḥammad's actions is palpable. Nevertheless, it is often believed that to emphasise the Qur'ān's influence might taint history with religiosity; thus, the 'socio-political' reading of Muḥammad's history prevails.

On the other hand, scholars such as Rahman, Denny, and Eickelman investigate the Qur'ānic vision and, in doing so, produce a different reading of history. They emphasise the Qur'ān as Muḥammad's *motivator*, thus casting his actions as more gradual than systematised, more humanistic than political. This viewpoint does not view with scepticism the 'convenience' with which Qur'ānic revelations relate to contemporary situations. Rather, it recognises the Qur'ān's contemporaneousness as its genius, and that there is a coherent Qur'ānic vision for humanity to which Muḥammad was trying to conform.

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[15] Armstrong is an author, feminist and writer on world religions. Her books most relevant to this thesis are: *Islam: A Short History* (New York: Modern Library, 2002); and *Muhammad: A Western Attempt to Understand Islam* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1991).

[16] Rahman was a well-known Pakistani-born scholar of Islam who taught at the University of Chicago. His *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980) is invaluable to this present thesis.

[17] Denny is an Islamic studies scholar at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Two of his publications are particularly relevant to this thesis: '*Ummah* in the Constitution of Medina,' *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 36, no. 1 (January, 1977): 39-47; and 'Ethics and the Qur'ān: Community and World View,' in *Ethics in Islam*, 103-121, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1985).

[18] Eickelman is Ralph and Richard Lazarus Professor of Anthropology and Human Relations at Dartmouth College. Relevant to this thesis is his article: 'Islam and Ethical Pluralism,' in *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism, and Conflict*, 115-134, ed. Sohail H. Hashmi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

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In the study of Islam and pluralism, the works of Abdulaziz Sachedina,[19] Ali S. Asani,[20] Amyn Sajoo,[21] Reza Shah-Kazemi,[22] and Fazlur Rahman are especially useful. Sachedina's influential book, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, examines pluralist theory and practice in Islam and the Qur'ān. Asani presents the Qur'ān as a text that intrinsically insists on pluralism, and offers insight into modern exclusivist behaviors as motivated by socio-economic and political tensions. Sajoo's *Muslim Ethics* presents an insightful and visionary conceptual outlook on contemporary civic problems and the role played by ethics in general – and Islamic ethics in particular – in their amelioration, with the ethic of pluralism at the forefront. Shah-Kazemi's work is a stirring and poignant examination of a Qur'ānic metaphysic that places common humanity at its apex. Rahman's *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* is a venture into determining the Qur'ān's overall orientation and remains important and seminal. In his *Themes*, Rahman has examined some of the critiques regarding pluralist policies towards 'People of the Book'. Also worthy of mention is the late Qur'ān commentator Muhammad Asad's[23] commentary on the Qur'ān, which presents a humanistic interpretation of the Revelation and takes into account chronological insights; his work will be used frequently throughout this thesis.

Regarding the history of the Medinan period (622-632 CE), Rahman's book, as stated, is an important resource, all the moreso as it critiques some commonly held assumptions about Muḥammad's relations with other religions and their followers, especially the Jews.

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[19] Sachedina is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia's. His *Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) is pioneering.

[20] Asani is Professor of the Practice of Indo-Muslim Languages and Culture at Harvard University. Important to this thesis is his article: 'On Pluralism, Intolerance, and the Quran'.

[21] Sajoo lectures in political science at Simon Fraser University. His *Muslim Ethics: Emerging Vistas* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004) is of great importance to this thesis. Also used in this thesis is his article: 'Civil Imagination after September 11, 2001,' *The Ismaili United Kingdom* (March, 2005): 38-40.

[22] Shah-Kazemi is Research Associate at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London. Of much importance to this thesis is his article: 'The Metaphysics of Interfaith Dialogue: A Qur'anic Perspective,' in *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East*, 140-189, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2002).

[23] Asad, a Jewish convert to Islam, was one of the most respected modern Qur'ān commentators. His commentary in *Message of the Qur'ān: Translated and Explained* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1984) is used throughout this present work.

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Other important scholars for Medinan history are W. Montgomery Watt, Marshall Hodgson, F.E. Peters,[24] Karen Armstrong, R.B. Serjeant,[25] and Frederick M. Denny. Watt's *Muhammad in Medina* is an important resource on early Islamic history, not least of all for of its reproduction of the Constitution of Medina. Hodgson's influential *Venture of Islam* provides a useful survey of the history of the period. Peter's *Muḥammad and the Origins of Islam* provides us with a thorough (and modern) perspective of early Islamic history. Armstrong's books – intended for a popular audience – provide us with a liberal and modern perspective of early Islam; for this reason, she provides much background information missed in other works. Serjeant's work on the Constitution is invaluable: he has contributed much to our understanding of the lexical, historical, and anthropological contours of the document. Finally, Denny's work on the concept of *ummah* provides insight into how this term was used in the Qur'ān as well as in the Constitution, and is thus of primary import in understanding the ethic and intention behind the term's application.

[24] Peters lectures on Middle Eastern Studies at New York University. Of relevance to this thesis is his *Muḥammad and the Origins of Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).

[25] Serjeant is Professor Emeritus of Arabic at Cambridge University. Of much importance to this thesis are his articles: 'The "Constitution of Medina",' *Islamic Quarterly* 8, nos. 1 and 2 (January-June, 1964): 3-16; and 'The *Sunnah Jāmi'ah*, Pacts with the Yathrib Jews, and the *Taḥrīm* of Yathrib: Analysis and Translation of the Documents Comprised in the So-Called "Constitution of Medina",' in *The Life of Muḥammad*, vol. 4, 151-192, ed. Uri Rubin (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1998).

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Whereas 'diversity' is the presence of heterogeneity, 'pluralism' – as a socio-political philosophy – is the *valuing* of human diversity to the extent that it promotes the existence and promulgation of various internal groups and their differing ethnic, religious, or political backgrounds within one society.[1] The term is one which in modern times has become popular and has its own definitions, implications, and shadings.[2]

Nevertheless, as this thesis is concerned chiefly with religion and the interactions between religious groups, the term 'pluralism' will be used in the context of religion. Thus, 'pluralism' is the idea that (1) different religious groups can co-exist in one society under their own legal and theological systems, and (2) that no one group has a monopoly on 'salvation'. 'Pluralism' is differentiated from 'inclusivism' as such: while a proponent of the former *recognizes* the salvific validity of other religions, the latter *tolerates* the existence of differing opinion but believes itself superior. 'Exclusivism', however, rejects outrightly any divergence of opinion and asserts its own opinion as true.

The 'ethic of pluralism' is the idea that there persists between humans an intrinsic, metaphysical unity; that there is within each human a spark of the Divine flame, which links them both to the Divine and to each other. This notion of unity propounds a respect for the 'other' on the basis of a common humanity, which in turn promotes a shared appreciation

[1] As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary: 'the existence or toleration of a diversity of ethnic groups or differing cultures and views within a society.'

[2] See, for example, *inter alia*: R.D. Grillo, *Pluralism and the Politics of Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); R.E. Flathman, *Pluralism and Liberal Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981); John Hick, *An interpretation of religion: human responses to the transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Hans Kung, 'Christianity and World Religions: The Dialogue With Islam as One Model,' *The Muslim World*, volume 77, no. 2 (1987).

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for common goals and interests. The 'ethic of pluralism', then, refers to the *idea* that different groups and individuals can co-exist and respect each other's beliefs.

A purposeful distinction is made here between 'pluralism' and the 'ethic of pluralism'. One often hears the contention that the Prophet did not use or know of the term 'pluralism', and thus to suggest that the Prophet implemented pluralist policies is anachronistic as well as historically and academically fallacious. However, it is not anachronistic to assert that the *notion* of pluralism existed in Muḥammad's Arabia. The Qur'ān and the 'Constitution of Medina' suggest that the *ethic* of pluralism was something that the Prophet understood and practised as part of his public policy at Medina. That some later Muslim societies did not uphold this principle (though, of course, many did)[3] is not indicative of the Qur'ānic ethos of or position on pluralism, and it does not change the Prophet's policies towards other religious groups, which a modern-day policy maker might recognise as concordant with what we now call pluralist public policy.

Pluralism and its Discontents

Aside from this critique of anachronism, the most widespread criticism of pluralism-in-Islam is that Islam is a religion and therefore must have 'special problems' in granting salvation to non-members. However, Abdulaziz Sachedina contends that 'Islam has never harboured a widespread belief that Jews and Christians are to be denied salvation if they do not first convert to Islam.' He continues:

> Unlike the early Christians, the early Muslims felt no need to establish their socio-political and religious identity at the expense of another community. Moreover, Muslims, unlike the Jews, did not regard their own community as uniquely selected to receive divine guidance in a world otherwise bereft of it. Muslims thought of their community as one among many divinely guided communities, all at their beginning equally blessed.[4]

[3] Such as: the Umayyads in Spain; the Fatimids in Egypt; the Ottomans in Turkey; and the Mughals in India. This will be discussed briefly in Chapter Two.
[4] Sachedina, 69.

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Indeed, Muḥammad's religion-centred community at Medina, as we shall see, included Jews and other religious groups. The Qur'ān, furthermore, extends its 'salvational invitation' to all nations, since they have all received prophets from God (Q. 10:47), who makes no distinction between those prophets (Q. 3:84). Furthermore, by insisting that salvation is to be achieved by righteous deeds, not allegiance to creed (Q. 2:62), the Scripture shifts the focus toward the universal – the promise of salvation is a gift to *all* humans, not *some* humans:

> Lo! Those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muḥammad), and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabaeans - whoever believeth in God and the Last Day and doeth right - surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve (Q. 2:62).[5]

According to Asad, this is a fundamental doctrine of Islam, and is 'unparalleled' in any other faith: 'the idea of "salvation" is here made conditional upon three elements only: belief in God, belief in the Day of Judgment [i.e. individual moral responsibility],[6] and righteous action in life.'[7] This universalist position is espoused in many verses of the Qur'ān, such as 28:88[8] or 2:115, which reads: 'Unto God belong the East and the West, and whithersoever ye turn, there is God's Countenance.'[9] Through such verses, the Divine comes to be seen not as the property of any individual or creed, but, rather, as a mercy to each individual seeker. God, then, is Absolute, while the individual is relative. 'No religion,' writes George Washington University's Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 'whether it be Islam or Christianity, Hinduism or Buddhism, can be without a doctrine as to what is Absolute and what is relative.'[10] In this perspective, then, the word 'God' is transformed into an ideal, or an idea, that relates to each individual and his or her personal philosophy. Therefore,

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[5] Pickthall translation.
[6] Asad, p. 153-4, n. 66.
[7] Ibid., p. 14, n. 50.
[8] 'Everything (that exists) will perish except His own Face' (Yusuf Ali translation). According to Asad's note on verse 55:27: 'the word 'face' or 'countenance' is 'a term used metonymically in classical Arabic to denote the "self" or "whole being" of a person - in this case, the essential Being, or Reality, of God.'
[9] Pickthall translation. See previous note for further clarification of the term 'countenance'.
[10] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and realities of Islam* (London: Aquarian, 1994), 15.

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salvation is open to 'anyone who accepts a Divine revelation [in] its most universal sense, be he a Muslim, Christian, Jew or Zoroastrian.'[11] It is clear, then, that creedal allegiance is not the determining factor for salvational success. This is made even clearer in the many verses like the aforementioned 3:84, which exhorts the Prophet to 'make no distinction' between the prophets of God, among whom the same verse lists Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. The Qur'ān asserts, though, that the list of God's prophets is not restricted to the Abrahamic traditions. It informs Muḥammad that – while God inspired him just as He did previous messengers – he remains unaware of the identity of all of God's messengers:

> Lo! We inspire thee as We inspired Noah and the prophets after him, as We inspired Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and as We imparted unto David the Psalms; *And messengers We have mentioned unto thee before and messengers We have not mentioned unto thee* (Q. 4:163-4).[12]

According to Aga Khan III, who was, among other things, a Shī'ī Imam as well as a President of the League of Nations (1937-1939):

> All Islamic schools of thought accept it as a fundamental principle that, for centuries, for thousands of years before the advent of Mohammed, there arose from time to time messengers, illumined by Divine grace, for and amongst those races of the earth which has sufficiently advanced intellectually to comprehend such a message. Thus Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and all the Prophets of Israel are universally accepted by Islam. Muslims indeed know no limitation merely to the Prophets of Israel; they are ready to admit that there were similar Divinely-inspired messengers in other countries — Gautama Buddha, Shri Krishna, and Shri Ram in India, Socrates in Greece, the wise men of China, and many other sages and saints among peoples and civilizations of which we have now lost trace.[13]

Islam, thus, accepts non-Abrahamic traditions as among the recipients of God's revelations.

Despite all this, the assertion is often made that salvation is available only to the 'monotheists', what are called the 'People of the Book', namely the Jews and Christians. Indeed, while the term 'People of the Book' referred initially to the religious groups in the Arabian milieu, it was later expanded to include such groups as the Zoroastrians in Iran and Hindus and Buddhists in India. All these groups claimed to have received scriptures from

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[11] Ibid., 27.
[12] Pickthall translation. [Italics mine].
[13] Aga Khan III, *The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 174.

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God, and thus could be considered under the umbrella term, 'Book' – by using the word 'Book' in the singular form rather than the plural, the Qur'ān implies an essential unity between the people who have received revelation. Furthermore, the Qur'ān asserts that God has given a messenger to every community (Q. 10:47); therefore, a people's claims to having received revelation cannot be taken lightly. Indeed, this lesson was taught to Muḥammad, who was made to say: 'I believe in whatever revelation God has bestowed from on high' (Q. 42:15).[14] This is the sort of worldview that influenced the seventeenth-century Mughal prince, Dara Shikoh, to declare the Hindu scriptures, the Upanishads, to be the 'storehouse of monotheism' and claim that they were the *kitāb maknūn*, or 'hidden scripture', referred to in the Qur'ān (Q. 56:77-80).[15] Certainly, not all Muslims were ready to broaden the category of 'People of the Book' (and, oftentimes, scholars draw greater attention to the more violent historical examples regarding this issue). Nevertheless, the interpretations that allowed for that broadening resulted from an understanding of the Qur'ānic worldview as pluralistic.

Still, one often hears that Islam preaches exclusivism. Such arguments, as noted earlier, 'completely disregard the original historical contexts of revelation.'[16] Nevertheless, in 2005 there appeared on the shelves of popular bookshops an essay compilation – edited by Jihad Watch's Robert Spencer[17] and containing seventeen essays by the Egyptian-born British author Bat Ye'or[18] – with the provocative title, *The Myth of Islamic Tolerance*. In this anthology, Spencer writes:

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[14] Asad translation.
[15] Asani, 55.
[16] Ibid., 59.
[17] Spencer is the director of Jihad Watch (http://jihadwatch.org). His published works include: *Islam unveiled: disturbing questions about the world's fastest-growing faith* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002); and *Onward Muslim soldiers: how jihad still threatens America and the West* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Pub., 2003).
[18] Among Ye'or's published works are *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam*, trans. David Maisel, Paul Fenton, and David Littman (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1985); and *Islam and Dhimmitude: where civilizations collide*, trans. Miriam Kochan and David Littman (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Lancaster, UK: Gazelle Book Services, 2002).

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> [...] the preponderance of Qur'anic testimony favors not tolerance and harmony between Muslims and non-Muslims, but just the opposite. A fundamental component of the Qur'anic view of non-Muslims is the often repeated and implacable belief in its own superiority: 'The Religion before Allah is Islam' (sura 3:19), or, as another translation has it, 'The only true faith in God's sight is Islam.' Muslims, accordingly, are also superior to others: 'Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah.' By contrast, most Jews and Christians ('People of the Book') are wrongdoers: 'If only the "People of the Book" had faith, it were best for them: among them are some who have faith, but most of them are perverted transgressors' (sura 3:110).[19]

The Qur'ān is thus charged with upholding three (anti-pluralist) convictions: (1) Islam, the religion established by Muḥammad, is the only true faith; (2) Muslims, the followers of Muḥammad, are superior to others; and (3) most Jews and Christians are wrongdoers. None of these arguments, however, properly consider Qur'ānic or historical evidences.

Regarding the first issue: as any social scientist is aware, text translations must take into account the socio-historical milieu of the intended audience. In the paragraph cited above, two interpretations of verse 3:19 have been given; both, however, contain untranslated Arabic words (i.e. '*Allah*' and '*Islām*'). According to Asad, the verse may be translated thusly: 'The only [true] religion in the sight of God is [man's] self-surrender unto Him (*Islām*).' The point to consider here is the word '*Islām*', which most commentators translate as 'submission/surrender to God' (see: Yusuf Ali and Pickthall) or, as in Asad's articulation above, 'self-surrender unto God'. In his perhaps seminal statement on the issue, Asad notes that the application of the terms '*Islām*' and '*muslim*' to the followers of Muḥammad is a post-Qur'ānic development and cannot be applied when translating the Qur'ān:

> Throughout this work I have translated the terms 'muslim' and 'Islam' in accordance with the original connotation, namely, 'one who surrenders [or has surrendered] himself to God', and 'man's self surrender to God'.... It should be borne in mind that the 'institutionalised' use of the terms – that is, the exclusive application to the followers of Prophet Muhammad –

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[19] Robert Spencer, 'The Myth of Islamic Tolerance,' in *The myth of Islamic tolerance: how Islamic law treats non-Muslims*, 40, ed. Robert Spencer (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2005).

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represents a definitely post-Qur'ānic development and hence must be avoided in a translation of the Qur'ān.[20]

Though the Qur'ān affirms itself as the culmination of God's revelations, this does not, however, 'preclude all adherents of earlier faiths from attaining to God's grace: for – as the Qur'ān so often points out – those among them who believe uncompromisingly in the One God and the Day of Judgment (i.e., in individual moral responsibility) and live righteously "need have no fear, and neither shall they grieve".'[21]

What all this leads to, then, is the conclusion that the Qur'ān does not require one to follow the message of Muḥammad in order to be successful in salvation, or, indeed, even to be a *muslim*. While it is true that in some Muslim societies practice sometimes fell short of theory, the same is true for any society. The point here, however, is that, in theory, the Qur'ānic conception of Islam is not one that promotes an 'implacable belief in its own superiority' over other religions.

By not translating the word *'Islām'*, the authors of the book in question have either 1) chosen to mislead readers, or 2) demonstrated their ignorance of the importance of considering socio-historical contexts in translation. This is meant to be a popular book, however, not an academic one, and thus, one supposes, demonstrates lower standards of factual integrity. Unfortunately, due to its presence in popular bookshops (unlike many academic books) and its controversial content, it is both widely circulated and accepted as accurate. Fortunately, though, also because of that popularity, it has been widely reviewed. *Publishers Weekly*, for example, criticizes the authors for failing to define terms (such as *jihad* and *dhimmi*), being repetitious, and quoting the Qur'ān out of context:

Several authors also quote the Qur'an out of context and describe Muslims with large generalizations. Yasser Arafat, of the PLO, is presented as representing Muslim attitudes—a characterization most Muslims would probably disagree with. Comments describing alleged troublesome behavior by Muslims lack sources and citations. Some authors ignore basic

[20] Asad, p. 885, n. 17.
[21] Ibid., p. 153-4, n. 66.

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Islamic concepts; Bat Ye'or, for example, says that the *dhimmi* treatment was considered "justified by the superiority of the master-race," although the Qur'an strictly states that all races are equal in Islam.[22]

As for the second point raised in Spencer's anthology, we again face a problem in interpretation and translation. The book in question asserts, based on verse 3:110, that the followers of Muḥammad are superior to others: 'You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and you believe in God.'[23] Once again, we turn to the commentary of Muhammad Asad:

> As is obvious from the opening sentence of verse 110, this promise to the followers of the Qur'an is conditional upon their being, or remaining, a community of people who "enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and [truly] believe in God"; and - as history has shown - this promise is bound to lapse whenever the Muslims fail to live up to their faith.[24]

The Muslim community, writes Fazlur Rahman, 'is given no assurance whatever that it will be automatically God's darling unless, when it gets power on earth, it establishes prayers, provides welfare for the poor, commands good, and prohibits evil (Q. 22:41, etc.).'[25] In 47:38, Rahman points out, the Muslims are warned that 'If you turn your backs [upon the teaching], God will substitute another people for you who will not be like you.'[26]

Thus, as we can see, the Qur'ān is not asserting that the followers of Muḥammad are intrinsically superior; rather, they will only be considered 'the best community' if they remain righteous – the same promise as is extended to all communities and individuals. Indeed, as is shown in the remainder of verse 3:110, the Qur'ān promises salvation to the followers of all revealed religions so long as they do right and believe in God. As has been shown, this concept is central to Qur'ānic doctrine and recurs often.

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[22] *Publishers Weekly*. Review of *The Myth of Islamic Tolerance: how Islamic law treats non-Muslims*, ed. Robert Spencer (8 November 2004).
<http://reviews.publishersweekly.com/bd.aspx?isbn=1591022495&pub=pw>.
[23] Asad translation.
[24] Asad, p. 83-4, n. 82.
[25] Rahman, 167.
[26] As cited in ibid., 167.

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Finally, as regards the third point in Spencer's anthology, Asad renders the end of verse 3:110 thusly: 'Now if the followers of earlier revelation had attained to [this kind of] faith, it would have been for their own good; [but only few] among them are believers, while most of them are iniquitous.' This is a less inflammatory rendering than that in Spencer's book.

Muḥammad's relations with Jews and Christians underwent changes. Initially, Muḥammad believed they could all form a unified community, since all their messages emanated from a single source, i.e. 'the Hidden Book' (Q. 56:78). Indeed, as discussed earlier, that is why Muḥammad was made to declare in the Qur'ān that he believed in the prophethood of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, among others. According to Rahman, 'the word "Book" is, in fact, often used in the Qur'ān not with reference to any specific revealed book but as a generic term denoting the totality of divine revelations.'[27]

However, through his relations with the Jewish and Christian communities, Muḥammad came to be aware, in Mecca, that not only would the Jews and Christians not accept him but that they also did not recognize each other:

> The Jews say, The Christians have nothing to stand on, and the Christians say, The Jews have nothing to stand on, - while both recite the same Book (Q. 2:113).[28]

Initially, the Qur'ān did not refer to the Jews and Christians as separate communities. 'It was,' says Rahman, 'the awareness and subsequent recognition of the existence of the mutually exclusive Jewish and Christian communities (and probably equally exclusivist subgroups in Christianity) that led the Qur'ān first to call them "sectarians" and "partisans" and subsequently to recognize them (in Medina) as communities.'[29] It was only then that the Qur'ān proclaimed the followers of Muḥammad as a separate community following the primordial religion of God:

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[27] Rahman, 164. (See 2:213, for example.)
[28] As cited in ibid., 165.
[29] Ibid., 165.

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> Jews and Christians will never be pleased with you [O Muḥammad!] unless you follow their religion[s]; say [to them]: The guidance of God [not of Jews or Christians] is the guidance (Q. 2:120).[30]

The Qur'ān responds to these exclusivist claims by, once again, affirming the criteria of individual righteousness and asserting that no one community can lay claim to guidance or superiority. Such is the case in verse 2:124, where Abraham asks God if He would make of his progeny 'leaders of men', to which God replies: 'My promise does not extend to the unjust ones.'[31]

Thus, it is in the context of this strong rejection of exclusivism and salvational election that the Qur'ān judges some doctrines of Jews and Christians, namely (1) the superiority of one community through election (Q. 2:111), and (2) the doctrine of divine incarnation, which sets Jesus, and therefore Jesus' community, apart from other prophets as unique (whereas 'The son of Mary,' says the Qur'ān, 'was but a Messenger' before whom had gone many messengers (Q. 5:72-75)).

Despite this chastisement (which is delivered even to the pre-Islamic Arabs about Muḥammad (Q. 3:144)[32]), the Qur'ān speaks with tenderness of Jesus and his followers, as in verse 5:82: 'You shall find the nearest of all people in friendship to the Believers those who say they are Christians. This is because among them there are priests and monks and they are not a proud people.'[33] Also, in verse 57:27: 'Then we followed up [these Messengers] with Jesus, son of Mary, to whom We gave the Evangel, and We put in the hearts of his followers kindness and mercy.'[34]

Verses such as these inspire in their listeners a generosity of spirit which is reflective of the Qur'ānic message as a whole, the denial of which is a misrepresentation of that

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[30] As cited in ibid., 165.
[31] As cited in ibid., 166.
[32] Pickthall translation: 'Muhammad is but a messenger, messengers (the like of whom) have passed away before him [...]'
[33] As cited in Rahman, 169.
[34] As cited in ibid.

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message. As we have seen already, the 'faith' which is referred to in verse 3:110 is a primordial faith that is common not only to all communities, but also to all humans individually. Thus, to contend that the Qur'ān insists that 'most Jews and Christians are wrongdoers', as Spencer's anthology does so above, is to deny the overall tenor of the Qur'ān – to prod humans toward a vision of a unified humanity in which exclusivism is condemned, even as pluralism is praised.

Indeed, diversity is humankind's natural state, says the Qur'ān, which desires that humans come to 'know one another' (Q. 49:13) so that they can – in a dictum that avouches the essential ethic of pluralism – 'compete with one another in goodness' (Q. 5:48):

> Unto every one of you[35] have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto, you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works!

[35] Asad, p. 153-4, n. 66: 'The expression "every one of you" denotes the various communities of which mankind is composed.'

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The Qur'ān's ethos of pluralism is pervasive not only in the Scripture, but also in the life of Muḥammad, who once saw fit to rise to his feet while in mid-conversation to offer respect to a Jewish funeral in progress. When asked why by his companions, the Prophet retorted, 'Is he not a human soul?'[1] This respect for the intrinsic unity of humanity, regardless of creed, is one of the most central Qur'ānic doctrines and is avouched repeatedly, as in verse 4:1, which declares that all of humankind was created from 'a single soul'.

That we humans perceive differences between one another despite our essential unity is also addressed in the Qur'ān, which states: 'We have made you into nations and tribes so that ye may know one another' (Q. 49:13).[2] By coming to know one another, we come to understand the essential unity that inheres in and binds us all – the primary prerequisite for a cooperative society of diverse thoughts, aims, creeds, and races. The ultimate goal for humans, then, is to perceive existence as the unity, the 'single soul', that God proclaims it to be. This, the Qur'ān advises, is achieved by cooperating and competing with one another in goodness (Q. 5:48).

Thus, the Qur'ān's ethic of pluralism is expressed through the notion of an essential unity between humans. This, in the main, is the focus of the present chapter, which is divided in two parts. Part the First will showcase the Qur'ānic ethic of pluralism. Part the Second will discuss the emergence of exclusivist thought in the early Islamic period, focussing on the issue of violence, especially toward the 'People of the Book'; as well as the

[1] As recounted in Sajoo, *Muslim Ethics*, 76.
[2] Pickthall translation.

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concept of abrogation, which was a much-debated tool used to produce exclusivist readings of the Text.

PART THE FIRST

THE METAPHYSICAL BASIS FOR PLURALISM IN THE QUR'ĀN

In the twelfth century, Farīd ud-Dīn 'Aṭṭār wrote his famous mystical poem, *The Conference of the Birds*, which revealed the metaphysical notion of unity in diversity through the allegory of thirty birds (*'sih murgh'*) questing to find their king, the Simurgh. Once they reached their goal and found no Simurgh, they realised that they themselves were the *'sih murgh'*, bound together as one in a common metaphysical unity: 'At last, made perfect in Reality/ *You* will be gone, and only God will be.'[3] This awareness of the divine presence in all things, that we are all united by a common 'noble nature' (*fiṭra*), is expressed in the oft-quoted Prophetic Tradition, 'He who knows himself knows his Lord' (*man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa rabbahu*).

This ideal undergirded the pluralist policies of the early Muslim community, and is expressed elsewhere than the Constitution of Medina; such as in a letter attributed to the Caliph-Imam 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661 CE) to Mālik al-Ashtar on the latter's appointment as governor of Egypt: 'Incline your heart to show clemency, affection, sympathy, and beneficence to your subjects...after all, they are your kin and *equals in creation.*'[4] So it was that the metaphysical concept of apprehending the innate divinity and commonality amongst humans informed the ethic of the early Muslim society.

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[3] Farīd ud-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Dick Davis (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 32.

[4] Abū Hanīfah Nu'mān ibn Muḥammad, *The Pillars of Islam: Da'ā'im al-Islām of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān*, trans. Asaf A.A. Fyzee; completely revised and annotated by Ismail Kurban Husein Poonawala (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 140. [Italics mine.]

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The Metaphysics of 'Being'

The notion of a common divinity among human beings is born of the fundamental message of the Qur'ān, the principle of *tawḥīd*, expressed in the formula *lā ilāha illa allāh*, 'There is no god but God'. In the literal, exoteric sense, this principle affirms the oneness of God and negates the existence of other gods. Through a metaphysical, esoteric reading, however, it becomes an affirmation of the true nature of being – 'There is no reality but the one Reality'[5] – in which all things, including humans, are essentially one. The most vocal exponent of this concept of the 'Oneness of Being' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), as it came later to be called, is the thirteenth-century Andalusian thinker Ibn al-'Arabī, whose influence was so great that he came to be called al-Shaykh al-Akbar ('The Greatest Master'). For Ibn al-'Arabī, God is the only Reality, and everything else has a 'borrowed existence' from God. One of the most famous Ibn al-'Arabī scholars, State University of New York's William Chittick, explains:

> All things are intimately interrelated through their common roots in the Divine Reality. The universe in its indefinite multiplicity is nothing but the outward manifestation of God's names, which are the faces that God turns toward creation.[6]

God's Transcendence and Immanence

This metaphysical understanding of creation – that all exists within God – is fundamental to the notion of an innate unity binding humanity, which is the foundation for the creation of a harmonious pluralist society. The understanding one achieves at the point of gnosis (*ma'rifa*) (that 'there is no Me and there is no You'), the negation of egocentricity that occurs when distinctions between all things disappear and one perceives only the Real, is grounded in the important Qur'ānic verse: 'Everything will perish save His countenance [or essence]' (Q. 28:88).[7] This is essential to the notion that 'that which is absolutely real is eternal: it is the

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[5] Shah-Kazemi, 143.
[6] William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 123.
[7] Pickthall translation.

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Face of the Lord that, alone, subsists. Conversely, all that which is impermanent is, by that very fact, unreal in the final analysis.'[8]

The transcendence of God expressed in the above verse, as well as in Q. 55:26-27,[9] is complemented by the notion of God's immanence. The idea that God is *both* transcendent (*tanzīh*) and immanent (*tashbīh*) cautions us not to forget that the Real pervades and encompasses all things, including ourselves. According to the thought of Ibn al-'Arabī, 'God in Himself – absolute *wujūd* – is incomparable with all existent things, but *wujūd* makes its properties manifest in the cosmos, and in this respect God is somehow similar to the created things.'[10] The following are some of the most important verses referring to this complementary and all-inclusive dimension of the Divine Reality:[11]

> Unto Allah belong the East and the West, and whithersoever ye turn, there is Allah's Countenance (Q. 2:115).
>
> He is with you wheresoever ye may be (Q. 57:4).
>
> We are nearer to him [man] than his jugular vein (Q. 50:16).
>
> Know that Allah cometh in between the man and his own heart (Q. 8:24).
>
> Is not He surrounding all things? (Q. 41:54).
>
> He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward (Q. 57:3).

This notion of the immanence of God provides the ultimate foundation for pluralistic coexistence; the apprehension of the inner divinity of all that exists allows for the acceptance and appreciation of the 'other' as equal.

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[8] Shah-Kazemi, 150.
[9] Pickthall translation: 'Everyone that is thereon will pass away; There remaineth but the Countenance of thy Lord of Might and Glory.'
[10] Chittick, 24.
[11] Cited in Shah-Kazemi, 151. The Qur'ānic translations are Pickthall's.

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fiṭra ('noble nature')

Humanity's common divinity is grounded in an innate 'noble nature' (*fiṭra*), which informs a universal morality amongst all humans.[12] The following verse about the inherent dignity of humankind lends support to this universalist position:

> Verily We have honoured the Children of Adam. We carry them on the land and the sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have preferred them greatly above many of those whom We created (Q. 17:70).[13]

That humans possess an 'original nature' (*fiṭrat allāh*) – which God has instilled into them (see Q. 30:30 below) – means that morality cannot be viewed as arbitrary; rather, God, in His mercy, inspired His creatures with an inherent guidance that can be deduced by individual reasoning. Thus, humans are inherently prompted to recognize the common divinity between them. This is expressed in the important verse, 30:30:

> And so, set thy face steadfastly towards the [one ever-true] faith (*dīn ḥanīfan*), turning away from all that is false, in accordance with the natural disposition (*fiṭrat allāh*) which God has instilled into man: [for,] not to allow any change to corrupt what God has thus created - this is the [purpose of the one] ever-true faith; but most people know it not.[14]

In the same vein, the Qur'ān exhorts humankind never to forget its primordial creation from 'a single soul':

> O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. (Q. 4:1).[15]

The notion of the *fiṭra* is one that inspires a cooperative ethic between humans, since it is a reminder of the metaphysical unity that binds humanity and thus lays the foundation for a society based on the ethic of pluralistic coexistence. The *fiṭra*, then, is the Qur'ān's model of individual responsibility upon which a Muslim society is to be established, since it

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[12] Sachedina, 71ff.
[13] Pickthall translation.
[14] Asad translation. Pickthall's translation is as such: 'So set thy purpose (O Muḥammad) for religion, as a man by nature upright – Allah's original [nature] in which He created man. There is no altering (the laws of) Allah's creation. That is the right religion; but most men know not – [that they should] turn to Him [only].' The Arabic text is as such: فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّين حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ
[15] Pickthall translation.

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encourages a spirit of accommodation and tolerance that can be harnessed in order to effect the common good for society; 'working for the common good without insisting on imposing the beliefs and desires each holds most dear can result in a legitimate public space for diverse human religious experience.'[16] This space hearkens back to the era of the Prophet, in which a policy of non-discrimination towards non-Muslims was the norm. This Qur'ānic ideal of championing 'civil liberties' is grounded in the famous verse, 'There is no compulsion in religion (*dīn*)' (Q. 2:256)[17] – an idea which is the basis for tolerant coexistence amongst varied peoples.

The Universality of Religions

Much of the Qur'ān's message of universality is expressed by the idea that Islam's Prophet was in a line of some 124,000 prophets, all sent by God. The Qur'ān insists against differentiating between the prophets of God, who were all divinely guided messengers – indeed, as discussed earlier, Muḥammad is made to say in the Qur'ān: 'I believe in whatever revelation God has bestowed from on high' (Q. 42:15).[18] As cited earlier, there are many verses that affirm this universality of Islam and the validity of its predecessors:[19]

> Lo! We inspire thee as We inspired Noah and the prophets after him, as We inspired Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and as We imparted unto David the Psalms; And messengers We have mentioned unto thee before and messengers We have not mentioned unto thee ...

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[16] Sachedina, 77.

[17] Pickthall translation. Asad translates the verse as such: 'There shall be no coercion in matters of faith.' His commentary on the verse reads (p. 57-8, n. 249): 'The term *dīn* denotes both the contents of and the compliance with a morally binding law; consequently, it signifies "religion" in the widest sense of this term, extending over all that pertains to its doctrinal contents and their practical implications, as well as to man's attitude towards the object of his worship, thus comprising also the concept of "faith" [...] On the strength of the above categorical prohibition of coercion (*ikrāh*) in anything that pertains to faith or religion, all Islamic jurists (*fuquhā'*), without any exception, hold that forcible conversion is under all circumstances null and void, and that any attempt at coercing a non-believer to accept the faith of Islam is a grievous sin: a verdict which disposes of the widespread fallacy that Islam places before the unbelievers the alternative of "conversion or the sword".'

[18] Asad translation.

[19] All are Pickthall's translations.

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> Messengers of good cheer and of warning, in order that mankind might have no argument against Allah after the messengers (Q. 4:163-5).
>
> And for every nation (*umma*) there is a Messenger (Q. 10:47).
>
> And We sent no messenger before thee but We inspired him, (saying): There is no Allah save Me (Allah), so worship Me (Q. 21:25).
>
> Naught is said unto thee (Muḥammad) save what was said unto the messengers before thee (Q. 41:43).

Nonetheless, it was maintained that Islam's revealed law was to be the new normative for the followers of Muḥammad. Regardless, this would not render previous revelations null or ineffectual for its adherents, since God has 'appointed a divine law and a traced-out way' (Q. 5:48)[20] for each community, and the believer is meant to 'believe in that which was revealed unto Abraham [...] and Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord' (Q. 3:84).[21] God, we are told, makes 'no distinction between any of them' (Q. 3:84).[22] This worldview is reflective of the fundamental pluralist tenor of Islam that enfolds previous revelations and their followers into a unified human community, despite their chronological differences. That this ethic informed and inspired Muslim life-worlds and luminaries is attested vividly by Ibn al-'Arabī:

> Beware of being bound up by a particular creed and rejecting others as unbelief! Try to make yourself a prime matter for all forms of religious belief. God is greater and wider than to be confined to one particular creed to the exclusion of others. For He says, Wherever ye turn, there is the Face of God.[23]

The Qur'ān, in affirming the salvific validity of other faiths, confirms that humans will be judged not according to religious persuasion but, rather, moral performance as members of the human community. Thus, as we have seen, the basis of Qur'ānic pluralism is the performance of 'good works' (Q. 5:48), and its conception of a universal moral order is grounded in the recognition of an innate human nature.

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[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibn al-'Arabī, quoted in Shah-Kazemi, 180.

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HUMAN DIVERSITY IS DIVINELY WILLED

The definitive proof of the Qur'ān's pluralistic tenor is its affirmation that a diversity of ways (and its resultant interfaith dialogue) is divinely ordained. This is expressed evocatively in the aforementioned verse 5:48, which states that God deliberately made humankind into different groups so that they could compete with one another in 'good works'. Diversity among peoples is seen as a celebration of divine mercy and grandeur – the difference of humanity's languages and colours, says the Qur'ān (Q. 30:22),[24] is among God's signs. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, humankind was created from a 'single soul' (Q. 4:1) into men and women, nations and tribes: all of whom are meant to interact with each other and come to 'know one another' (Q. 49:13).

In regard to verse 49:13, Reza Shah-Kazemi observes:

> [T]he word for knowing one another, *ta'arafu*, and that for being "known" in the holy utterance, *u'raf*, are derived from the same root, *'arafa*, and is tied to the meaning of spiritual knowledge or gnosis, the essence of which is expressed in the famous *hadith*, "Whoso knows himself knows his Lord". Thus, knowledge of self, knowledge of the other and knowledge of God are all interwoven, and should be seen as complementary and mutually reinforcing, each element having a role to play in the attainment of spiritual knowledge or *ma'rifa*.[25]

The inherent inner substance of all revealed religions is affirmed in such verses as 22:67, which insists that God has given unto each nation their own 'sacred rites which they are to perform.'[26] Again, humankind's various communities are exhorted in verse 5:48 to abide by the dictates of their own religions, since God has appointed for each community of mankind a 'different law and way of life.'[27]

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[24] Pickthall translation: 'And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colours.'
[25] Shah-Kazemi, 154.
[26] Pickthall translation: 'Unto each nation have We given sacred rites which they are to perform; so let them not dispute with thee [Muḥammad] of the matter, but summon thou unto thy Lord.'
[27] Asad translation: 'Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community.' As stated earlier, he writes in his commentary: 'The expression "every one of you" denotes the various communities of which mankind is composed.'

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Despite all this ordained diversity, the Qur'ān reminds humans that there is an essential unity that persists between them, namely their common humanity:

> Mankind were one community [*ummah wāḥidah*], and God sent (unto them) prophets as bearers of good tidings and as warners, and revealed therewith the Scripture with the truth that it might judge between mankind concerning that wherein they differed (Q. 2:213).[28]

The Qur'ān, by affirming religious diversity, acknowledges its own universality. Whereas no other Scripture has maintained the validity of its predecessors, the Qur'ān avouches them time and again. In such a worldview, in which the acceptance of other faiths and its resulting interfaith dialogue is ordained, Muslims become required to recall continually the fundamental unity between all humans in all their interactions. Indeed, Muslims have no monopoly on divine grace (Q. 2:62; 5:69),[29] and Christians and Jews are enjoined to emphasise the essential similarities in belief (Q. 3:64).[30] Thus, the Qur'ānic models of the innate 'noble nature' (*fiṭra*) and the affirmation of the diversity of ways posit a world order in which humanity strives continually to create a just society based on that original motor of Islam: peaceful pluralistic coexistence.

PART THE SECOND

Muslims, says California State University's Amir Hussain, 'have always understood – and constructed – their "Islams" in a context of pluralism.'[31] Indeed, the pluralistic tenor of Muslim societies was palpable from the start. The first Muslim community, established by Muḥammad at Medina in the seventh-century CE, adopted what is commonly known as the

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[28] Pickthall translation.

[29] Pickthall translation: 'Lo! Those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muhammad), and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabaeans - whoever believeth in Allah and the Last Day and doeth right - surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve' (Q. 2:62); 'Lo! those who believe, and those who are Jews, and Sabaeans, and Christians - Whosoever believeth in Allah and the Last Day and doeth right - there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve' (Q. 5:69).

[30] Sohail H. Hashmi, 'Islamic Ethics in International Society,' in *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism, and Conflict*, 169, ed. Sohail H. Hashmi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[31] Amir Hussain, 'Muslims, Pluralism, and Interfaith Dialogue,' in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, 258, ed. Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003).

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Constitution of Medina, a document which R.B. Serjeant hails as being as important to early Islamic history as the Qur'ān.[32] As will be discussed in the next chapter, its pluralistic tendencies are captured in Article 25, which states that 'The Jews of Banu 'Awf are a community (*ummah*) along with the believers (*mu'minūn*).'[33] Non-Muslims, then, were part of the 'civic *umma*' constituted in Medina under the world's first formal constitution,[34] 'accompanied by mechanisms of implementation through consultation (*shūrā*).'[35] By including the Jews in the 'community of believers' (*ummah*), the Constitution of Medina created a society which F.M. Denny describes as having 'afforded a transcending allegiance structure with a higher ethical level combined with more adequate safeguards against the destructive traditions of the vendetta and the law of retaliation.'[36]

Later Muslim civilisations – such as Umayyad Spain, Fatimid Egypt, Ottoman Turkey, and Mughal India[37] – based their policies towards minorities on the Qur'ān's intrinsically humanist ethos, exemplified to them by the Prophet in his community at Medina. For example, the successes of the Fatimids, scholars agree, were 'in large measure due to the remarkable ethnic and religious tolerance of the dynasty and the administrative stability of the Fatimid state.'[38] According to the late University of California scholar G.E. von Grunebaum:

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[32] Serjeant, '"Constitution",' 3: '[F]rom the historical standpoint, this document is of as much interest, and even importance, for the early history of Islam as the Qur'ān itself.'

[33] Watt, 223. This Article and the issues attending it are discussed more fully in Chapter Three.

[34] According to one scholar: 'This constitution carries the title and privilege of being not only the first Islamic state constitution but also the first constitution on earth announced by a state' (Muhammad Hamidullah, quoted in: Ali Bulaç, 'The Medina Document,' in *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, 169, ed. Charles Kurzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 173).

[35] Sajoo, *Muslim Ethics*, 64.

[36] Frederick Mathewson Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan Pub. Co., 1994), 74.

[37] For more, see *inter alia*: María Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: how Muslims, Jews, and Christians created a culture of tolerance in medieval Spain* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002); Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: their history and doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Amyn B. Sajoo, *Pluralism in "old societies and new states": emerging ASEAN contexts* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1994); Amartya Sen, *The argumentative Indian: writings on Indian history, culture and identity* (London: Allen Lane, 2005).

[38] Daftary, 254.

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> All praise is due the Fatimids for having known how to induce the communities under their sway to develop their courage and enterprise and to preserve their intellectual élan without damaging that unity of the larger community which hinged on the dynasty's sense of purpose.[39]

Though there exist examples of intolerance throughout the Islamic experience, this seems common of any civilisation at any time, and is evident even today in the practises of what are considered the most developed states. Nevertheless, the history of Muslim civilisations shows a generally pluralistic policy. According to the American University of Beirut political scientist Ahmed Moussalli:

> [...] during medieval times, the Jews of Europe looked to the Jews of the Islamic world for inspiration. For instance, the Jews of Egypt lived side by side with Muslims and Christians, not in ghettos. They lived like other members of Egyptian society and participated in its affairs.[40]

Certainly, and as stated, examples of intolerance may be found in any society. In perspective, such social norms contemporaneous with the above cited Muslim societies included the caste system in Hindu India and the rule of aristocratic privilege in Christian Europe. Additionally, the policy of certain Christian rulers toward non-Christians was one of blatant persecution (this is well attested by the long history of Jewish persecution at the hands of various Christian societies). In 1492, both the Muslims and Jews were expelled from Spain, and violent policies were pursued toward both; in 1502, during the Inquisition, Muslims and Jews were offered the choice of conversion or death, and those who converted were not allowed to wear Islamic dress or to use Arabic or possess books in that language.[41]

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[39] Quoted in Shainool Jiwa, 'Religious Pluralism in Egypt: The Ahl al-kitab in Early Fatimid Times,' MESA Annual Meeting (19 November 2001), San Francisco.
<http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=101208>. Jiwa argues against the postulation of Samuel Stern, S. D. Goitein, and others that the Fatimids adopted this posture as a concession to being a minority Shi'ī group in a country that was predominantly Sunnī. She points to Yacov Lev's comparisons between the relative peace and lack of 'violent outbursts' suffered by the *ahl al-kitab* at the hands of the Muslim majority in Fatimid times, with the previous Tulunid (868-905 CE) and Ikshidid (935-969 CE) regimes. In considering possible causes for this, Lev alludes to the fact that the Fatimids did not require their policies to be approved by the Sunnī *'ulamā'* or indeed vetted by the 'Abbasids as was the case with the Tulunids and Ikhshidids prior to the Fatimids and Ayyubids (1169-1250 CE) (and the Mamluks after them).
[40] Ahmad S. Moussalli, *The Islamic Quest for Democracy, Pluralism, and Human Rights* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 140.
[41] Moussalli, 139.

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In contradistinction to these Christian policies, admits Princeton University's Bernard Lewis, Muslim societies were egalitarian and afforded the individual far greater social mobility than Christian Europe or Hindu India.[42] The point here is not to point the proverbial finger, but rather to provide historical perspective: in the broad scope of history Muslim civilisations were remarkable for their policies of tolerance and equality, both of which are ideals that modern-day states continue to struggle to implement.

EXCLUSIVISM

Whereas pluralism was an essential foundation of Islam, exclusivism was a later addition. In the centuries following the Revelation, the original pluralist impulse that prompted the Constitution of Medina was usurped by politically motivated factions who propounded exclusivist interpretations of the Qur'ān in order to justify warfare and territorial expansion.[43] This began immediately upon the Prophet's death, with the taxation wars of Abū Bakr (d. 634 CE) and Arab expansion under 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644 CE). As a new religious community with a growing geographical empire, exclusivist conceptions were seen to foster a sense of solidarity and identity among factional Arab tribes, and thus gained in momentum.[44]

Thus, in the eighth and ninth centuries there appeared the concept of 'supersession', a debated idea promoting the abrogation (*naskh*)[45] of certain pluralist verses in the Qur'ān by other seemingly more exclusivist verses, as well as the view that the Qur'ān, as God's last revelation, superseded all other revelations. It was with this mindset that certain mediaeval

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[42] Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 8-9.
[43] Asani, 55ff.
[44] Ibid., 56.
[45] *Naskh* is hermeneutic tool which has different uses. It is defined thusly in the article, 'Naskh,' in Cyril Glassé, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, rev. ed. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2001), 340-1: 'The principle by which certain verses of the Koran abrogate (or modify) others [...]. What is generally at issue is the modification of a universal meaning by a more specific one, a modification caused by an historic change of circumstance.'

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legal thinkers bifurcated the world into the *dār al-islām* (territories under Muslim suzerainty) and *dār al-ḥarb* (territories under non-Muslim control), a dichotomy that has no real basis in the Qur'ān or in Islamic ethics.[46] Later, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many Muslim countries underwent a moral crisis – a result of changing global economic norms – that led to attempts to 'purify' Islam. The most dramatic of these attempts was the eighteenth-century Wahhābī movement, which persecuted sects (mainly popular Sufi and Shī'ī groups) that it believed were upholding 'inauthentic' interpretations of the faith. More recent times have witnessed the frequent promotion of exclusivist views by so-called 'fundamentalist' groups in the Muslim world who themselves arose as a reaction against the powers of modernity, westernisation, and economic deprivation that were the legacies of the colonial fact, as well as the continued Western encouragement of repressive regimes in Muslim countries.[47] This is evinced by the still unresolved conflicts in the Middle East, Kashmir, and Afghanistan, to name a few, all of which find their historic roots in the political and economic consequences of the World Wars or colonialism and which, in the words of the modern Muslim leader Aga Khan IV, do not have 'anything to do with the faith of Islam.'[48]

Thus, exclusivist conceptions arose in reaction to socio-economic realities and can not be seen as representative of the Qur'ānic message. Such conceptions are contested by many scholars, such as Fazlur Rahman, who argues that verses justifying exclusivism make up a tiny minority of the message of the Qur'ān, whose overall emphasis is on voluntary

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[46] Asani, 58.

[47] See, generally: Fazlur Rahman, *Revival and reform in Islam: a study of Islamic fundamentalism*, ed. Ebrahim Moosa (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000); and Mohammed Arkoun, 'The State, the Individual, and Human Rights: A Contemporary View of Muslims in a Global Context,' in *The Muslim Almanac: A Reference Work on the History, Faith, Culture, and Peoples of Islam*, 453-7, ed. A. Nanji (Detroit: Gale Research, 1996).

[48] Keynote address by His Highness the Aga Khan (19 May 2004), at the Governor General's Canadian Leadership Conference on Leadership and Diversity, The Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, Quebec, Canada: <http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=104233>.

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consent to the will of God.[49] What becomes clear, then, is that verses that appear to inspire intolerance and coercion were wilfully misrepresented and made prominent, in an attempt to overpower the essential and overarching message of the Qur'ān: one of toleration for individual search.

VIOLENCE AND THE 'PEOPLE OF THE BOOK'

This toleration for individual spiritual agency was afforded in Muslim polities to different faith groups under the umbrella term 'People of the Book' (*ahl al-kitāb*). In the Medinan community, Jews and Christians held the special status of *dhimmī* ('Protected Peoples'; lit. 'security'), which refers to a contract whereby non-Muslims would pay a poll tax (*jizya*) to be exempted from military service.[50] According to Moussalli:

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[49] See, generally, Rahman, *Major Themes*.

[50] Glassé, 'Jizyah,' in *Encyclopedia*, 242:'It was normally understood to be a tax for civil protection and the upkeep of the army, but it did in practice sometimes take on the aspect of a tribute.' According to Asad, p. 261, n. 43: 'The term *jizyah*, rendered by me as "exemption tax", occurs in the Qur'ān only once, but its meaning and purpose have been fully explained in many authentic Traditions. It is intimately bound up with the concept of the Islamic state as an *ideological organization*: and this is a point which must always be borne in mind if the real purport of this tax is to be understood. In the Islamic state, every able-bodied Muslim is obliged to take up arms in *jihād* (i.e., in a just war in God's cause) whenever the freedom of his faith or the political safety of his community is imperilled: in other words, every able-bodied Muslim is liable to compulsory military service. Since this is, primarily, a religious obligation, non-Muslim citizens, who do not subscribe to the ideology of Islam, cannot in fairness be expected to assume a similar burden. On the other hand, they must be accorded full protection of all their civic rights and of their religious freedom: and it is in order to compensate the Muslim community for this unequal distribution of civic burdens that a special tax is levied on non-Muslim citizens (*ahl adh-dhimmah*, lit., "covenanted" [or "protected"] people", i.e., non-Muslims whose safety is statutorily assured by the Muslim community). Thus, *jizyah* is no more and no less than an exemption tax in lieu of military service and in compensation for the "covenant of protection" (*dhimmah*) accorded to such citizens by the Islamic state. (The term itself is derived from the verb *jazd*, "he rendered [something] as a satisfaction", or "as a compensation [in lieu of something else]" - cf. Lane II, 422.) No fixed rate has been set either by the Qur'ān or by the Prophet for this tax; but from all available Traditions it is evident that it is to be considerably lower than the tax called *zakāh* ("the purifying dues") to which Muslims are liable and which – because it is a specifically Islamic religious duty – is naturally not to be levied on non-Muslims. Only such of the non-Muslim citizens who, if they were Muslims, would be expected to serve in the armed forces of the state are liable to the payment of *jizyah*, provided that they can easily afford it. Accordingly, all non-Muslim citizens whose personal status or condition would automatically free them from the obligation to render military service are statutorily – that is, on the basis of clear-cut ordinances promulgated by the Prophet – exempted from the payment of *jizyah*: (a) all women, (b) males who have not yet reached full maturity, (c) old men, (d) all sick or crippled men, (e) priests and monks. All non-Muslim citizens who volunteer for military service are obviously exempted from the payment of *jizyah*.' According to Moussalli, 130-1: 'Most jurists except the Hanafis viewed *jizya* as compensation for protecting the minorities. The Malikite jurist Ibn Rushd, for instance, viewed *jizya* as a yearly payment for protection and security whereby the minorities did not have to fight the state's enemies,

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> *Dhimma* means simply security, and a *dhimma* contract means that non-Muslims became members of the Islamic state and enjoyed equal rights and incurred equal duties. This contract made by Islamic authorities and non-Muslims was based, like any other contract, on mutual agreement. Such a contract obliged the Islamic state to protect and defend minorities in exchange for *jizya*. Those non-Muslims who fought alongside the Muslims – that is, became an organic part of the Muslim community – did not pay *al-jizya* [...] Put differently, non-Muslims were like naturalized citizens or permanent residents who had certain rights and duties depending on the level of their naturalization.[51]

Thus, the *dhimmī* contract was effectively a system of social welfare, whereby rich non-Muslims could determine their level of involvement in the community, and poor non-Muslims were not financially burdened. The second caliph 'Umar, for example, once took in an elderly Jewish beggar, and instructed the keeper of state funds to 'look after this man and the people who are like him.'[52]

Still, as discussed earlier, the Qur'ānic conception of 'People of the Book' underwent varying phases, in accordance with Muḥammad's interactions with various groups. Indeed, the Qur'ān's pronouncements on people of different religions were often restricted to those with whom the early Muslim community were in actual social contact, and was even limited occasionally to certain tribes or groups rather than the entire body of practitioners.[53] At first, the ordinances of the *dhimmī* pact referred only to Jews and Christians in Arabia, though the Prophet widened its scope to include the Magi in Bahrain and even the Copts in Egypt.[54] As we have seen already, its definition was expanded later to include other religious groups the Muslims encountered, such as the Zoroastrians in Iran and the Hindus and Buddhists in

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inasmuch as payment of the *jizya* was conditioned on the existence of an Islamic ruler who protected minorities. Al-Mawardi, a Shafi'ite, also looked on *jizya* as a source of protection and security for minorities. Only Hanafi jurists saw *jizya* as a punishment for not adhering to Islam. If this were the case, however, most jurists argued that it would have been imposed on all members of minorities, and not only on the rich. Also, it would not have been legally abrogated when members of minorities defended the land of Islam along with the Muslims or when the Islamic state could not protect the minorities.'

[51] Moussalli, 130.

[52] Ibid., 131.

[53] Esack, 152.

[54] Moussalli, 131.

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India.[55] Indeed, as mentioned, 'the word "Book" is, in fact, often used in the Qur'ān not with reference to any specific revealed book but as a generic term denoting the totality of divine revelations (see 2:213, for example).'[56]

The Qur'ān, then, conceptually gave salvational significance to all human communities, a doctrine which later Muslim scholars and administrators would actualize in their practical day-to-day policies. One example of this is the Umayyad caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (d. 720 CE), who attempted to glean a *fatwā* (legal opinion) from the leading jurist Abū al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728 CE) in order to prohibit minorities from consuming wine and pork. Al-Baṣrī refused him, saying that as long as the *ahl al-dhimma* ('Protected Peoples') paid their *jizya*, they were free to believe as they chose, and that the caliph should follow the religious regulations on these matters.[57]

In principle, it was not required that the People of the Book convert to Islam. Indeed, the Arabs were not interested in converting non-Muslims to Islam, writes University of North Carolina Islamic scholar Carl Ernst: 'Non-Muslim subjects, in lieu of military service, paid an additional tax initially modeled on the Roman and Persian taxes levied on craftsmen; therefore, conversion to Islam would have meant the loss of revenue to the state – never a popular consideration for rulers.'[58]

Nevertheless, some exegetes considered the more tolerant verses towards the 'People of the Book' abrogated by other verses that seemed to permit warfare against them, such as verse 9:29:

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[55] According to Azim A. Nanji ('Portraits of self and others: Isma'ili perspectives on the history of religions,' in *Mediaeval Ismai'ili History & Thought*, 153-4, ed. Farhad Daftary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)): 'In addition to Jews and Christians, there were now others among the ahl al-dhimma (Protected Peoples): Sabaeans, Zoroastrians, Indians, and others, some of whom included in their world-views residual philosophical and intellectual traditions of classical antiquity. The process of exchange and reflexivity generated by the confluence became a major factor in encouraging the interest of Muslim scholars in other religious and intellectual traditions.'

[56] Rahman, 164.

[57] Moussalli, 135.

[58] Carl Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 120.

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> [And] fight against those who – despite having been vouchsafed revelation [aforetime] – do not [truly] believe either in God or the Last Day, and do not consider forbidden that which God and His Apostle have forbidden, and do not follow the religion of truth [which God has enjoined upon them] till they [agree to] pay the exemption tax with a willing hand, after having been humbled [in war].[59]

'These verses,' writes the influential Algerian-born Islamic scholar Mohammed Arkoun, 'like the rest of Sura 9, warrant a long historical and theological commentary.'[60] For that reason, he calls attention to the 'urgent need for a modern rereading of these sacred texts that takes account of historical context and doctrinal struggles aggravated by the appearance of the Qur'an at the beginning of the seventh century.'[61] Verses such as 9:29 above and 9:5 (which states that one should 'slay the [idolaters][62] wherever ye find them') have been brandished by exegetes anxious to justify offensive action against the 'other'. In doing so, however, they effectively deny the contextualist and gradualist nature of the Qur'ānic revelation by excoriating verses from their original instances of revelation. Indeed, scholars in the modern period – such as George Hourani,[63] Toshihiko Izutsu,[64] and Fazlur Rahman – argue that the Qur'ān presents an entire ethico-religious worldview, a proper appreciation of which depends on an understanding of the text as a whole. According to Mohammad Hashim Kamali, who is professor of law at the International Islamic University of Malaysia:

> [The Quran's] pronouncements on various topics appear in unexpected places and in no particular thematic order. This fact has led many thinkers to conclude that the Quran is an

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[59] Asad translation.

[60] Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, trans. and ed. Robert D. Lee (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 72.

[61] Arkoun, 72.

[62] Pickthall translates this word, *mushrikūn*, as idolaters. Asad's translation, however, is more thorough: 'those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God'. Asad writes (p. 225, n. 2): 'These words, addressed to the *mushrikūn* ("those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God") who have deliberately broken the treaties in force between them and the believers, indicate a cancellation of all treaty obligations on the latter's part.'

[63] Hourani was a scholar at the State University of New York. Among his most notable works are: *Islamic rationalism: the ethics of 'Abd al-Jabbār* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971); and *Reason and tradition in Islamic ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[64] Izutsu was professor at McGill University's Institute of Islamic Studies. Among his most notable works are: *God and man in the Koran: semantics of the Koranic Weltanschaung* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964); and *Ethico-religious concepts in the Qur'ān* (Montreal: McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University Press, 1966).

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indivisible whole, and its legal parts should not be read in isolation from its religious and moral teaching.[65]

Approaching a meaningful understanding of the Qur'ānic message, therefore, requires recognizing that the Scripture was a living text that was revealed in parts and that adapted itself to circumstantial vicissitudes. Verse 9:5, for example, reads in its entirety:

> And so, when the sacred months are over, slay those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God wherever you may come upon them and take them captive, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every conceivable place! Yet if they repent, and take to prayer, and render the purifying dues, let them go their way: for, behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.[66]

Historically, this and proximate verses refer to a dispute with certain tribes; grammatically, the use of the definite article in the text limits the content of these verses to the specific tribes involved. According to Mount Holyoke College's Sohail H. Hashmi, 'the full context in which the verse occurs limits its application to the pagan Arabs who were so implacably opposed to the earliest Muslim community at Medina.'[67] Indeed, the line 'if they repent...let them go their way' intimates to scholars that an attack must have been initiated against the Muslims by these 'idolaters'.[68] Moreover, religious scholar Clinton Bennett argues that an exclusivist interpretation of this verse removes it 'both from the context of what the Quran says about war (defensive, or to right a wrong) and from the context of Quranic exegesis.'[69] Asad, in his commentary on verse 9:5, writes:

> As I have pointed out on more than one occasion, every verse of the Qur'ān must be read and interpreted against the background of the Qur'ān as a whole. The above verse, which speaks of a possible conversion to Islam on the part of "those who ascribe divinity to aught beside

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[65] Mohammad Hashim Kamali, 'Law and Society: The Interplay of Revelation and Reason in the Shariah,' in *The Oxford history of Islam*, 119-20, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[66] Asad translation. Picthall's translation is as such: 'Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due, then leave their way free. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.' The Arabic text is as such:
كَافَّةً فَخَلُّوا فَإِذَا انسَلَخَ الأَشْهُرُ الْحُرُمُ فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدتُّمُوهُمْ وَخُذُوهُمْ وَاحْصُرُوهُمْ وَاقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ كُلَّ مَرْصَدٍ فَإِن تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلاَةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّ
سَبِيلَهُمْ إِنَّ اللّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

[67] Sohail H. Hashmi, 'Interpreting the Islamic Ethics of War and Peace,' in *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism, and Conflict*, 207, ed. Sohail H. Hashmi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[68] A.G. Noorani, *Islam & Jihad: Prejudice versus Reality* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2002), 53.

[69] Clinton Bennett, quoted in Ibid.

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God" with whom the believers are at war, must, therefore, be considered in conjunction with several fundamental Qur'ānic ordinances. One of them, "There shall be no coercion in matters of faith" (2:256), lays down categorically that any attempt at a forcible conversion of unbelievers is prohibited - which precludes the possibility of the Muslims' demanding or expecting that a defeated enemy should embrace Islam as the price of immunity. Secondly, the Qur'ān ordains, "Fight in God's cause against those who wage war against you; but do not commit aggression, for, verily, God does not love aggressors" (2: 190); and, "if they do not let you be, and do not offer you peace, and do not stay their hands, seize them and slay them whenever you come upon them: and it is against these that We have clearly empowered you [to make war]" (4: 91). Thus, war is permissible only in self-defence (see *sūrah* 2, notes 167 and 168), with the further proviso that "if they desist-behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace" (2: 192), and "if they desist, then all hostility shall cease" (2: 193). Now the enemy's conversion to Islam - expressed in the words, "if they repent, and take to prayer [lit., "establish prayer"] and render the purifying dues (*zakāh*)" - is no more than one, and by no means the only, way of their "desisting from hostility"; and the reference to it in verses 5 and 11 of this *sūrah* certainly does not imply an alternative of "conversion or death", as some unfriendly critics of Islam choose to assume.[70]

It is worth mentioning here that Muḥammad never initiated aggressive action; indeed, 'Muslims are forbidden from initiating hostilities, and warned when taking up arms in self-defense to "not transgress limits" (2:190).'[71] This philosophy is expressed perhaps most candidly by the Egyptian scholar Muḥammad Abū Zahra: 'War is not justified...to impose Islam as a religion on unbelievers or to support a particular social regime. The Prophet Muhammad fought only to repulse aggression.'[72]

Moreover, the Qur'ān advises the Prophet to show tolerance towards his opponents: 'If it had been your Lord's will, they would all have believed, all who are on earth. Would

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[70] Asad, p. 256, n. 9.

[71] Amyn B. Sajoo, 'Ethics in the Civitas,' in *Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives*, 232, ed. Amyn B. Sajoo (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002). As shown above, Asad translates this verse as such: 'And fight in God's cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression – for, verily, God does not love aggressors.' In his commentary on the verse (p. 41, n. 167), Asad declares: 'This and the following verses lay down unequivocally that only self-defence (in the widest sense of the word) makes war permissible for Muslims. Most of the commentators agree in that the expression *lā ta'tadū* signifies, in this context, "do not commit aggression"; while by *al-mu'tadīn* "those who commit aggression" are meant. The defensive character of a fight "in God's cause" - that is, in the cause of the ethical principles ordained by God - is, moreover, self-evident in the reference to "those who wage war against you", and has been still further clarified in 22: 39 - "permission [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged" [...] That this early, fundamental principle of self-defence as the only possible justification of war has been maintained throughout the Quean is evident from 60:8, as well as from the concluding sentence of 4:91, both of which belong to a later period than the above verse.'

[72] As translated in Hashmi, 'Ethics of War and Peace', 208.

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you [O Muḥammad] then compel mankind against their will to believe?' (10:99).[73] Indeed, the Qur'ān repeatedly avouches and safeguards freedom of belief for all peoples; 'while it disagreed with many beliefs of the Jews and Christians, it nonetheless did not call for their forcible conversion but for dialogue with them.'[74] All this is capped by the absolute prohibition of aggression in the aforementioned apothegmatic verse 2:256: 'There is no compulsion in religion'. About this verse Asad asserts:

> [A]ll Islamic jurists (*fuqahā'*), without any exception, hold that forcible conversion is under all circumstances null and void, and that any attempt at coercing a non-believer to accept the faith of Islam is a grievous sin: a verdict which disposes of the widespread fallacy that Islam places before the unbelievers the alternative of "conversion or the sword".[75]

Despite all this, however, recent times have seen polemical commentaries portraying Muslims and Islam as inherently inclined toward anti-rationalism and violence. According to Bernard Lewis, for example, 'war for the faith has been a religious obligation within Islam from the beginning.'[76] In his infamous book, *The Clash of Civilizations*, Harvard University political scientist Samuel Huntington warns: 'the underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism, but rather Islam, a different civilization, in which a concept of non-violence is absent from Muslim doctrine and practice.'[77] For Lewis, Huntington, and others, Islam is a religion with a 'propensity toward violent conflict'.[78]

Amyn Sajoo, in his *Muslim Ethics*, delivers a scathing critique of such arguments. By using the term 'propensity', says Sajoo, Huntington suggests a disposition devoid of rationality – a generalization that fails to consider the impetus behind actions, such as 'grievances about political and economic hegemony, colonial occupation, and the brutality of

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[73] Cited in Eickelman, 118.
[74] Moussalli, 85.
[75] Asad, p. 57-8, n. 249. At p. 58.
[76] Bernard Lewis, 'The Revolt of Islam,' *The New Yorker* (19 November 2001): 50-63. <http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/011119fa_FACT2>.
[77] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 217.
[78] Huntington, 258. He adds that Islam 'glorifies military virtues' (p. 263), and that in the propensity toward violent conflict only Chinese civilizations match Islam.

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secular rulers whose power is underwritten by Western establishments.'[79] Lewis, says Sajoo, 'commands particular attention as an "authority" on Islam, despite the fact that his corpus of writings shows a proclivity to sweeping generalizations that would seldom pass the test of serious scholarship on Christian or Jewish historical traditions and their political implications.'[80]

Writers such as Lewis and Huntington continue to insist that Islam, the Qur'ān, and Muslims are intrinsically violent despite all the scriptural evidence we have seen to the contrary. 'It requires a few moments of informed reflection,' writes Sajoo, 'to see that the Qur'an and the Prophet *were not licensing but limiting* the grounds on which defensive warfare could be conducted by Muslims.'[81] To this end, he quotes verse 2:190, which, as stated already, declares: when fighting 'in God's cause against those who wage war on you, do not transgress limits, for God loves not the transgressors.'[82] The rules of war lain out in the Qur'ān include injunctions against harming non-combatants, women, and children; commands to preserve religious sanctuaries; and strict regulations governing the treatment of prisoners; all of which Sajoo says are 'remarkably similar to modern humanitarian law as embodied in the Hague and Geneva Conventions.'[83]

Sajoo then addresses the contention that the Qur'ān has a propensity towards violence by drawing attention to references to violence found in Judaeo-Christian scriptures:

> The Book of Joshua lyrically narrates the killing of 'every living creature' in the name of Yahweh's vision of Israel (10:28-40; 11:14). The Book of Deuteronomy is no less sparing: 'You shall destroy all the peoples ...showing them no pity' (7:16), and 'You shall put all its males to the sword. You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, the livestock, and everything in the town – all its spoil – and enjoy the use of the spoil of your enemy which the Lord your God gives you' (20:14-15).[84]

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[79] Sajoo, *Muslim Ethics*, 51.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., 55.
[82] As cited in Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., 57.

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Nevertheless, he concludes, the object here is not to 'set up a normative or historical contest,' but rather to emphasise that 'judgements about the locus of ethics and fidelity to them is complex in all faith traditions, and seizing upon a particular episode or historical phase as emblematic or conclusive in this regard is an exercise in ideological manipulation.'[85]

ABROGATION

The theory of abrogation (*naskh*) played a formative role in the propagation of exclusivist thought. Abrogation was an essential tool in the exclusivist arsenal and it was employed by some classical Muslim Quran scholars in order to 'circumvent the obvious meaning of inclusiveness in qur'anic texts.'[86] The Qur'ān's pluralist tenor was suppressed actively, writes South African Muslim scholar Farid Esack, through 'forced linguistic and exegetical exercises [meant] to compel inclusivist texts to produce exclusivist meanings.'[87]

Much of the difficulty regarding abrogated verses lies in whether or not to accept the judgements of past scholars. Indeed, Abdulaziz Sachedina argues that 'all 137 putatively abrogated verses are in fact still valid.'[88] Generally, however, scholars tended to legitimate newer verses over older ones, but this was due to a loose understanding of the generic sense of the term *naskh* ('transformation, substitution, or elimination'):[89] 'the early exegetes who collectively developed this theory disagreed greatly over the occasions of revelation, their

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[85] Ibid., 57.
[86] Esack, 161.
[87] Ibid., 147.
[88] Sachedina, 30: 'The modern scholarship of some prominent Muslim jurists has provided incontrovertible documentation that all 137 putatively abrogated verses are in fact still valid.'
[89] Ibid.: 'The major problem facing modern scholars is whether to accept the judgment of past scholars about a given abrogated verse. Evidently, in finding a contradiction between an earlier and a later verse, scholars have tended to award legitimacy to the newer one, thus abrogating the earlier verse. This attitude is rooted either in poor judgment or in a loose application of the word *naskh*. The application of the generic sense of *naskh* (transformation, substitution, or elimination) to situations that required application of its technical sense (supersession) has created enormous difficulties in assessing the pluralistic message of the Koran.'

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dating, and which verses abrogated which.'[90] Asad, in his commentary on verse 2:106,[91] declares:

> At the root of the so-called "doctrine of abrogation" may lie the inability of some of the early commentators to reconcile one Qur'ānic passage with another: a difficulty which was overcome by declaring that one of the verses in question had been "abrogated". This arbitrary procedure explains also why there is no unanimity whatsoever among the upholders of the "doctrine of abrogation" as to which, and how many, Qur'ān-verses have been affected by it; and, furthermore, as to whether this alleged abrogation implies a total elimination of the verse in question from the *context* of the Qur'ān, or only a cancellation of the specific ordinance or statement contained in it.[92]

The Qur'ān, nevertheless, does not directly or indirectly advocate the abrogation of previous revelations.[93] On the contrary, it affirms the salvific validity of its predecessors, such as in the previously mentioned important verse, 2:62:

> Lo! Those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muḥammad), and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabaeans - whoever believeth in Allah and the Last Day and doeth right - surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve.[94]

'Most of the exegetes,' says Esack, 'exercise themselves to no avail to avoid the explicit meaning of these texts, i.e., that anyone who has faith in God and the Last Day and who acts in a righteous manner will attain salvation.'[95] To contend, as many exegetes have done, that the messages of Moses or Jesus or any other prophet were superseded by Muḥammad's message is therefore a denial of the Qur'ānic message. Ibn al-'Arabī exhorts powerfully and poetically against such contentions:

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[90] Reuven Firestone, *Jihād: The Origin of Holy War in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 50. On the subject of the supersession of verses, Firestone concludes: 'The fact is that the conflicting qur'ānic verses cannot prove an evolution of the concept or sanction for religiously authorized warring in Islam from a nonaggressive to a militant stance' (64).

[91] Pickthall translation: 'Nothing of our revelation (even a single verse) do we abrogate or cause be forgotten, but we bring (in place) one better or the like thereof.'

[92] Asad, p. 22-3, n. 87. At p. 23

[93] 'It is not far-fetched to suggest that debates about Islam superseding Christianity and Judaism, despite the explicit absence of any reference to the issue in the Koran, must have entered Muslim circles through the ardent Christian debates about Christianity having superseded Judaism, especially since Christians claimed to be the legitimate heirs to the same Hebrew Bible that was the source of Jewish law' (Sachedina, 32).

[94] Pickthall translation.

[95] Esack, 162.

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> All the revealed religions [*sharā'i'*] are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the lights of the stars. When the sun appears, the lights of the stars are hidden, and their lights are included in the light of the sun. Their being hidden is like the abrogation of the other revealed religions that takes place through Muhammad's revealed religion. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist, just as the existence of the lights of the stars is actualized. This explains why we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all the messengers and all the revealed religions. *They are not rendered null [*bāṭil*] by abrogation – that is the opinion of the ignorant.*[96]

Regarding specifically verse 2:62 above, many scholars uphold that it was abrogated by verse 3:85: 'And whoso seeketh a *dīn* other than *islām*, it will not be accepted from him.' This text, however, is no less inclusive than 2:62, since '*dīn*' and '*islām*' are universal terms that apply to all humankind. As stated earlier, the original connotation of the term '*islām*' was 'self-surrender to God' and its application to the followers of Muḥammad exclusively is a post-Qur'ānic development that 'must be avoided in a translation of the Qur'ān.'[97] Salvation, then, was to be granted on an individual basis to all those who followed the primordial religion taught by God's prophets, namely 'self-surrender to God'. What is significant here, says Esack, is that verse 3:85 was considered at an earlier stage to afford salvation to groups outside the Medinan community. 'It was only much later,' he writes, 'when the exegetes had recourse to more sophisticated exegetical devices, that alternatives to this theory became possible in order to secure exclusion from salvation for the Other.'[98]

In his commentary on verse 2:106, Asad writes:

> The principle laid down in this passage - relating to the supersession of the Biblical dispensation by that of the Qur'ān - has given rise to an erroneous interpretation by many Muslim theologians. The word *ayah* ("message") occurring in this context is also used to denote a "verse" of the Qur'ān (because every one of these verses contains a message). Taking this restricted meaning of the term *ayah*, some scholars conclude from the above passage that certain verses of the Qur'ān have been "abrogated" by God's command before the revelation of the Qur'ān was completed. Apart from the fancifulness of this assertion – which calls to mind the image of a human author correcting, on second thought, the proofs of his manuscript, deleting one passage and replacing it with another – there does not exist a single reliable Tradition to the effect that the Prophet ever declared a verse of the Qur'ān to have been "abrogated".[99]

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[96] Chittick, 125. [Italics mine].
[97] Asad, p. 885, n. 17.
[98] Esack, 163.
[99] Asad, p. 22-23, n. 87. The Arabic text of Q. 2:106 is as such: مَا نَنسَخْ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِّنْهَا أَوْ مِثْلِهَا

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The abrogation of verse 2:62 is rejected, furthermore, by leading classical commentators such as al-Tabari (d. 923 CE) and the Shī'ī commentator al-Tabarsi (d. 1153 CE). Al-Tabari, in his commentary on verse 2:106 ('We abrogate no verse, nor do We cause it to be forgotten, but that We bring one better than it or like it'),[100] states that the principle of abrogation 'only pertains to such issues as commands and prohibitions, proscriptions and generalizations, preventions and authorizations. But as for reports (*akhbār*), they cannot abrogate nor be abrogated.'[101] Thus, the concept of supersession, according to esteemed commentators, has little integrity. Regarding verse 2:62, al-Tabari writes that it should be upheld literally, 'because, in respect of the bestowal of reward for virtuous action with faith, God has not singled out some of His creatures as opposed to others.'[102] Thus, the individual's salvation is tied to the individual's virtue and not to this or that creed.

SUMMARY

The continual and gradual revelation that was the Qur'ān was a response to the fluid, socio-political nature of Muḥammad's mission, whose aim it was to establish a just human society. This project in civic pluralism was buttressed by an essentially humanistic ethos that desired 'mercy for all humankind'. That in this project the bond of humanity trumped formal creedal allegiance is clear. What is also clear is that the Qur'ān's pluralist tenor was co-opted repeatedly, often through lexical legerdemain, in order to dismantle and displace the Qur'ān's guarantees and generosities toward the 'other'. To say, then, that the Qur'ān promotes exclusivism or violence is to ignore its overarching, pluralist message in favour of limited understandings of select verses restricted in their application.

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[100] As cited in Shah-Kazemi, 187.
[101] Quoted in ibid.
[102] Quoted in ibid.

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In the years following the *hijra* (migration from Mecca to Medina[1]) of 622 CE, Medina came to be constituted of three main social groups: Jews, Muslims, and pagan Arabs. In a radical break with contemporary Arabian societal structures – which were organized around ties of blood and kinship – Muḥammad joined these groups into what the first article of the Constitution of Medina calls: 'a single community (*ummah*) distinct from (other) people.'[2] The Qur'ān itself refers to this diverse *ummah* as 'one single community' in verse 21:92.[3] For the first time, then, 'people from totally divergent geographical, ethnic and cultural backgrounds gathered and identified themselves as a distinct social group.'[4]

According to Karen Armstrong:

> Muhammad had become the head of a collection of tribal groups that were not bound together by blood but by a shared ideology, an astonishing innovation in Arabian society. Nobody was forced to convert to the religion of the Quran, but Muslims, pagans and Jews all belonged to one *ummah*, could not attack one another, and vowed to give one another protection.[5]

This conceptualization of *ummah* as an inclusive, religion-centred community is significant because it accents the pluralistic tenor of Muḥammad's aspirations. The *ummah* comprised members of different religious creeds in a human community of common interests: 'And, verily, this community (*ummah*) of yours is one single community (*ummah*

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[1] Medina was an agglomerate of villages, the most important of which was Yathrib. After the Prophet's migration there, the entirety was renamed Medina.
[2] Watt, 221.
[3] Asad translation: 'Verily, [O you who believe in Me,] this community of yours is one single community, since I am the Sustainer of you all: worship, then, Me [alone]!'
The Arabic text is as such: إِنَّ هَٰذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُونِ. This verse is a 'direct reference' to the conception of *ummah* referred to in the opening of the 'Constitution', writes Serjeant ('The *Sunnah Jāmi'ah*,' 5).
[4] Bulaç, 169. Serjeant suggests that there is local precedent for toleration of different religious beliefs: 'there is before us the example of the Quraysh pantheon at Mecca, which indicates a tolerance of other cults including Christianity – even to the extent of having Christian iconography in the Ka'bah itself' ('The *Sunnah Jāmi'ah*,' 4).
[5] Armstrong, *Islam*, 14.

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wāḥidah), since I am the Sustainer of you all: remain, then, conscious of Me!' (Q. 23:52).[6] This verse, says Asad, is addressed to all those who truly believe in God, regardless of creed:

> As in 21: 92, [this] verse is addressed to all who truly believe in God, whatever their historical denomination. By the preceding reference to all of God's apostles the Qur'ān clearly implies that all of them were inspired by, and preached, the same fundamental truths, notwithstanding all the differences in the ritual or the specific laws which they propounded in accordance with the exigencies of the time and the social development of their followers.[7]

In keeping with this Qur'ānic doctrine, Muḥammad's goal in Medina was to found a unified community based on belief, not on kinship. To this end, he sought to include the Jews in his community by drawing attention to the commonality between his religion and theirs, which was to be found in the person of Abraham (Q. 2:135-137). Abraham was, for Muḥammad, the 'arch-monotheist' (*ḥanīf*) and thus the common ancestor and model (Q. 16:123) for the Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

This chapter will demonstrate that religious pluralism was at the forefront of the Prophet's agenda by showing: [1] that the *ummah*, as described in the Constitution, was conceptualized by the Qur'ān, and therefore Muḥammad, as a community of believers in God (Q. 21:92) and who 'perform righteous deeds' (Q. 2:62), regardless of religious affiliation (Q. 22:67); and that [2] Muḥammad, at the Qur'ān's behest (Q. 16:123), tried to actualize this theory by connecting himself with the primordial religion of Abraham (Q. 6:160-164), the monotheist exemplar, who belonged to no one group, tribe, or religion (Q. 2:135; 3:67); and, finally, [3] the implications of Muḥammad's connexion with Abraham, as well as his relations with specific Jewish tribes, which, despite their controversies, had no bearing on the Qur'ānic affirmation of religious pluralism (which, as we have seen, is attested in verses such as Q. 42:15; 3:83-84; 5:48, etc.).

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[6] Asad translation. The Arabic text is as such: وَإِنَّ هَٰذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ

[7] Ibid., p. 524, n. 28.

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In the minds of many scholars, the Constitution of Medina – preserved in Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīrah*[8] - is the world's first constitution. It deals, firstly, with defining treaty relations of mutual aid between the signatories, and punishments that would accrue from breaking those agreements. Secondly, it deals with the position of the Jews in relation to the other groups.

The Constitution, consisting of about fifty clauses,[9] is stated to have been written by Muḥammad on account of the Muhājirūn ('Emigrants' from Mecca), the Anṣār ('Helpers', i.e. local Medinans), and the Medinan Jews during the early days after his arrival in Medina.[10] How the Jewish tribes – the three chief ones being the Naḍīr, Qurayẓa, and Qaynuqā' – came to be in Medina is disputed.[11] Regardless of their origins, by the time Muḥammad reached Medina the Jewish tribes appear to have been allied as subordinates to the two major Arab tribes, Aws and Khazraj, who themselves both belonged to the Banu Qayla.[12] These pagan Arabs became the Anṣār with whom Muḥammad paired each of his Muhājirūn in bonds of fraternity.

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[8] Muḥammad Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq* (Rabat: Ma'had al-Dirāsāt wa-al-Abḥāth lil-Ta'rīb, 1976). 'The "Constitution" appears for the first time in the *Sīrah* of Ibn Isḥāq,' says Serjeant ('"Constitution",' 4).

[9] The Constitution is translated and arranged in different ways by different scholars. For our purposes, the most relevant are: Serjeant's ('The *Sunnah Jāmi'ah*,' throughout), and Watt's (221-225). I have used the latter, which is reproduced identically in Denny, '*Ummah*,' 39-47.

[10] Serjeant, '"Constitution",' 3.

[11] According to Watt, 192: 'That there were Jews in Medina when Muḥammad went there is clear, but how they came to be there and whether they were of Hebrew stock is not clear. Were they descendents of fugitives from Palestine – perhaps after the rising of Bar Khokhba? Were they mainly Arabs who had adopted the Jewish faith? Such questions have been much discussed first by Muslims scholars and then by Western scholars, but no general agreement has been reached. The Jewish tribes had many customs identical with those of their pagan Arab neighbours and intermarried with them, but they adhered firmly to the Jewish religion, or at least to a form of it, and maintained their distinct existence.'

[12] Peters, 193. About the Aws and Khazraj, Peters writes: 'How or when they displaced the Jewish tribes from their position of hegemony in Medina is unknown, though it appears not to have been a formal or protracted struggle, and the mid-sixth century...seems to be a plausible date for the change in the balance of power. [...] Once the Arab newcomers became paramount, peace still did not come to the oasis. The Banu Qayla fell to fighting among themselves, Aws and Khazraj, with each side attempting to court the assistance of the Jewish tribes, and Yathrib was torn by civil strife for nearly a century before the Prophet was summoned from Mecca to intervene.'

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The authenticity of the Constitution is not disputed among most Western scholars of Islam; indeed, Serjeant declares it 'unquestionably authentic'.[13] The Constitution is considered by most scholars to be a composite of different documents and treaties composed over several years, and not a single document, as it appears to be in Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīrah*. Watt believes that there may be reasons for thinking it is actually a collection of articles which 'originated at different dates.' He notes, among other things, that there are 'certain linguistic variations' and that 'certain articles come near to being repetitions of other articles.'[14] Serjeant has concluded that the Constitution comprises eight distinct documents written at various intervals during the first seven-odd years of the Medinan period. Having compared its language and content with other pre-modern and modern Arabian documents, he asserts that the Constitution is concordant with the politics of the times: in penning the treaties 'Muḥammad acted in accordance with Arabian political patterns in existence from the remote past.'[15]

Ummah: 'One Single Community'

What is significant about the Constitution is that it provides an extra-Qur'ānic view of functional aspects of the early Muslim community, which was composed of different tribes and religious groups, each with their own quarrels.[16] Certainly, the Constitution was a political-military agreement, but, as with all the events of Muḥammad's life, it cannot be viewed as extracted from the religious and metaphysical focus that the Qur'ān brought to bear on all Muḥammad's concerns and actions.

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[13] Serjeant, '"Constitution",' 1.
[14] Watt, 226.
[15] Serjeant, 'The *Sunnah Jāmi'ah*,' 1.
[16] The various tribes of Yathrib, says Armstrong (*Muhammad*, 143), were 'caught up in a cycle of violence; the constant warfare was ruining the land, destroying the crops and undermining the source of Yathrib's wealth and power. The Jewish tribes had become deeply involved in the conflict, and allied themselves in various configurations to either the Aws or the Khasraj. By 617 there was a stalemate. No one group could gain ascendancy and both sides and their allies were exhausted by the conflict.'

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The *ummah* was certainly one such concern; indeed, its creation and preservation was perhaps the most important issue that occupied the Prophet's community in Medina. The usage of the term in the Constitution suggests that the *ummah* included the Jews. Denny considers it a 'significant fact' that all the kinship ties mentioned are subsumed into the *ummah*.[17]

This is expressed contractually in articles 25-31 of the Constitution, which name the Jewish tribes as belonging to the *ummah*. Thus, article 25 of the Constitution states that 'The Jews of Banū 'Awf are a community (*ummah*) along with the believers,' while at the same time affirming the validity of individual religious practice: 'To the Jews their religion (*dīn*) and to the Muslims their religion.'[18] These statements recall Qur'ānic principles regarding the legitimacy and unity of pluralist belief and practise (Q. 22:67; 5:48) as well as the maxims against coercion in religion, such as in verses 109:6 and 2:256.

In post-Muḥammadan Islam, *ummah* came to mean the Muslim community exclusively. However, this is not the case in the Qur'ān, where the term's meaning underwent development; as stated already, in verse 21:92 the conception of *ummah* is as inclusive as that expressed in the beginning of the Constitution. According to Denny, the Qur'ānic usage of *ummah* to refer solely to the Muslims is rare, and is limited to Q. 2:128, 143 and Q. 3:104, 110. These verses are chronologically late, while most occurrences, he says, include the Christians and the Jews, such as at Q. 23:52, 21:92, 16:120, and 22:34.[19] Understanding this development, asserts Denny, is important; if the Jews were included in the *ummah*, then necessarily the *ummah* was not exclusively a religious community of Muslims. Serjeant, based on his reading of article 25, believes that the Jews were a separate

[17] Denny, *Ummah*, 43.
[18] Watt, 223.
[19] Denny, *Ummah*, 44, n. 14.

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ummah alongside the Muslim *ummah*.[20] Watt, on the other hand, contends that the Jews are part of the *ummah*. He suggests that the last use of *ummah* in the Qur'ān is to be dated a little after the Battle of Uḥud (A.H. 3), and that even though article 25 is subsequent to the execution of the Banū Qurayẓah (A.H. 5), this implies no contradiction in the term's usage, only a 'development dictated by circumstances'.[21]

Following Richard Bell's contention that *ummah* appeared in the Qur'ān only three times in the pre-Medinan period, Watt proposes that the term was introduced only after the new type of community at Medina was envisaged.[22] Up to that period, he says:

> *Ummah* was the sort of word that could be given a new shade of meaning; and it also was capable of further development subsequently. Hitherto it had been said that a prophet was sent to his *qawm*, but *qawm*, which may be translated as 'tribe', had for long been associated with the kinship-group, which was the only form of social and political organization known in Arabia. When *ummah* is first used in the Qur'ān it is hardly to be distinguished from *qawm*; every beast and bird is even said to be an *ummah* [6:38]. Mostly, however, the *ummah* is a community to which a prophet is sent; 'each *ummah* has a messenger' [10:47/48]. Gradually, however, *ummah* comes to mean more and more a religious community, until in the latest instances (none much after Uḥud according to Bell) *ummah* is applied almost exclusively to the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities, or some section of them.[23]

Although the term *ummah* eventually did come to denote religious communities, it was also expressive of an essential universality between those communities, as is seen in verses such as 3:64 and 21:92, the latter of which reads: 'Verily, [O you who believe in Me,] this community (*ummah*) of yours is one single community (*ummah wāḥidah*), since I am the Sustainer of you all: worship, then, Me [alone]!'[24] This verse appears at the end of a discussion of some earlier prophets (such as Abraham, Noah, Solomon, Moses, and Jesus), and is addressed to the listeners of their synonymous messages. In his commentary on the verse, Asad writes: 'After calling to mind, in verses 48 - 91, some of the earlier prophets, all

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[20] Serjeant, '"Constitution",' p. 13. The transliterated text is as such: *wa'inna yahūda banī 'awf 'ummatun ma'a 'l-mu'minīn.*
[21] Watt, 241.
[22] Ibid., 240.
[23] Ibid., 240-1.
[24] Asad translation.

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of whom stressed the oneness and uniqueness of God, the discourse returns to that principle of oneness as it ought to be reflected in the unity of all who believe in Him (See 23:51).'[25] The next verse, 21:93,[26] laments that 'later generations cut off their affair of unity from one another'; it continues, however, to remind humankind of its essential unity, in words that conjure both mercy and hope, saying 'yet will they all return to Us.'

The Qur'ān apprises Muḥammad of his spiritual identity with previous prophets and instructs him to believe in and accept all revealed religions: 'Say (O Muḥammad): I believe in any and every Book that God has revealed' (Q. 42:15).[27] Thus, the commonality of God's revelations to humankind indicates the commonality that persists between humans. It is this notion of pluralism – that there is an essential and inherent unity between humans and their communities – that informed Muḥammad's notion of *ummah* as a 'community of believers' united in their belief in God.

The Abrahamic Connexion

Muḥammad strengthened that notion of unity by identifying himself as following in the tradition of Abraham, the original '*muslim*' ('one who submits'). Muḥammad was told to follow the 'religion' (*millah*) of Abraham (Q. 16:123), the archetype of the *ummah muslimah* (Q. 2:127-129), upon which he was to model his own community.[28] Abraham, according to verse 16:120, 'was a man who combined within himself all virtues, devoutly obeying God's will, turning away from all that is false, and not being of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God.'[29] Thus, Abraham is made for Muḥammad the 'spiritual and historical model for

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[25] Asad, p. 500, n. 89.
[26] Yusuf Ali translation.
[27] As cited in Rahman, 137. As stated earlier, 'the term "the Book" is often used in the Qur'ān not to denote any specific scripture but as a generic term for the totality of revealed scriptures' (Ibid.).
[28] Denny, 'Ethics,' 112.
[29] Asad translation.

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the Muslim ummah.'[30] Through Abraham, the Qur'ān links Muḥammad's message with those of previous prophets, like Moses and Jesus. By emphasizing the primordial religion of Abraham as well as his shared prophetic position, the Qur'ān surmounts and surpasses the issue of salvational exclusivity:

> And they [the Jews and Christians] say, "Be Jews" - or, "Christians" – "and you shall be on the right path." Say: "Nay, but [ours is] the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false, and was not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God." Say: "We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and that which has been vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus; and that which has been vouchsafed to all the [other] prophets by their Sustainer: we make no distinction between any of them. And it is unto Him that we surrender ourselves." And if [others] come to believe in the way you believe, they will indeed find themselves on the right path; and if they turn away, it is but they who will be deeply in the wrong, and God will protect thee from them: for He alone is all-hearing, all-knowing (Q. 2:135-137).[31]

Thus, the Qur'ān does not deny salvation or spiritual success to those who do not follow the message of Muḥammad. Rather, it ensures 'reward' to those who follow properly their own revealed religions (Q. 22:67; 5:48), since 'Naught is said unto thee [Muḥammad] save what was said unto the messengers before thee (Q. 41:43).'[32] Indeed, and as discussed earlier, Muḥammad is made to say in the Qur'ān:

> Say (O Muḥammad): We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and that which was vouchsafed unto Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered (*muslimūn*) (Q. 3:83-84).

Thus, as has been stated, the function of the Prophet Muḥammad – who claimed that 'The prophets are paternal brothers...their religion is one' – was to recapture the pure monotheism of Abraham. Furthermore, by stressing the common lineage of Islam with Christianity and Judaism by linking them all to Abraham, the Qur'ān denounces any attempts to appropriate that heritage: 'It is not belonging to the community of Jews or Christians which leads to guidance, but the straight path of Abraham' (Q. 2:135), since

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[30] Denny, 'Ethics,' 109.
[31] Asad translation.
[32] Pickthall translation.

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Abraham 'was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but an upright person (*ḥanīf*) who submitted to God' (Q. 3:67).[33] On this score, Esack, in his *Qur'ān, Liberation & Pluralism*, writes:

> [T]he Qur'an is explicit in its acceptance of religious pluralism. Having derided the petty attempts to appropriate God, it is inconceivable that the Qur'an should itself engage in this [...] For the qur'anic message to be an alternative one, it had to offer the vision of a God who responds to all humankind and who acknowledges the sincerity and righteousness of all believers. The Qur'an, thus, makes it a condition of faith to believe in the genuineness of all revealed religion (2:126; 2:285; 3:84).[34]

Thus, by connecting Muḥammad and his message to that of Abraham, the Qur'ān propounds a societal order that, though religious, is not exclusive. Rather, it affirms the validity of pre-Muḥammadan traditions, and, in a turn that presages modern pluralist sentiments, places the emphasis for salvation not on allegiance to creed but rather on righteousness of deed.

THE JEWS

Connecting himself to Abraham, some scholars say, was Muḥammad's attempt to disassociate himself from the Medinan Jews after his endeavors to convince them of the commonality of their respective messages had failed. This argument was made, for example, by Snouck Hurgronje, a prominent Orientalist:

> In Madina came the disillusionment; the 'People of the Book' will not recognize him [Muḥammad]. He must, therefore, seek an authority for himself beyond their control, which at the same time does not contradict his own earlier Revelations. He, therefore, seizes upon the ancient Prophets whose communities cannot offer him opposition [i.e., whose communities are not there or no longer there: like Abraham, Noah, etc.].[35]

In this viewpoint, the Abrahamic connexion was a device used by Muḥammad to distinguish his message from that of the Jews and Christians because they had rebuffed his attempts to establish a community along with them. According to Rahman, however, this was not the case. The Abrahamic connexion, Rahman asserts, was articulated by the Qur'ān during

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[33] As cited in Esack, 159.
[34] Ibid., 159.
[35] As cited in Rahman, 132.

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Muḥammad's time in Mecca and did not result from what has come to be called the 'break with the Jews'[36] in 624 CE, under whose rubric is also placed the expulsion of the Banū Qaynuqā' (624 CE) and Naḍīr (625 CE), and the execution of Banū Qurayẓah men in 627 CE.

It is believed by some that Muḥammad was a strategist of sorts, who had initially tried to imitate the religion of the Jews of Medina in order to placate them, but, in the face of opposition, then decided to break away from their religion. This is the sort of conclusion wrought by a reading of history that does not properly consider the role of the Qur'ān in the Prophet's motivations and actions. The Qur'ānic revelations themselves portray a gradual change in Muḥammad's policies, which were revised constantly (with the guidance of the Qur'ān) to accord with changing circumstances. Regarding Muḥammad's relations with the Jews, Watt argues against the view 'sometimes put forward by European scholars that in the second year after the Hijrah Muḥammad adopted a policy of clearing all the Jews out of Medina just because they were Jews.'[37] He writes:

> In general it was not Muḥammad's way to have definite policies of such a kind. What he did have was a balanced view of the fundamentals of the contemporary situation and of his long-term aims, and in the light of this he moulded his day-to-day plans in accordance with the changing factors in current events.[38]

Certainly, while Muḥammad was mindful of and increasingly adept at politics (as attest his adaptive policies), it should be kept in mind that his aim from the start was to be in concordance with Qur'ānic dictums and ethics; his motivations, in other words, were Qur'ānic, not political.

Another problematic area in the interpretation of Islam's early history, says Rahman, is the bifurcation of the Prophetic career into the 'Medinan' and 'Meccan' periods – a custom to which he says most scholars have become 'addicted'. He continues, adding that 'a closer

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[36] Richard Bell, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān*, revised and enlarged by W. Montgomery Watt (Edinburgh: University Press, 1977), p. 12: 'What is known as "the break with the Jews" occurred about March 624, shortly before the battle of Badr.'
[37] Watt, 217.
[38] Ibid.

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study of the Qur'ān reveals a gradual development, a smooth transition where the later Meccan phase has basic affinities with the earlier Madinan phase; indeed, one can "see" the latter in the former.'[39]

Regarding Muḥammad's position and affinity towards Abrahamic monotheism, Rahman asserts that it appears at the end of the Prophet's time in Mecca.[40] This emphasis on the Abrahamic religion comes as a reminder and a clarification: Abraham is not only a monotheist, but a straight, non-deviant monotheist, unlike some members of monotheistic communities who have fallen astray (Q. 2:129-132).

On the other hand, Watt notes, in regard to the conception of the Abrahamic faith:

> This is an idea which is not found in the Meccan revelations and is presumably not based on pre-Islamic Arab legends.[41]

The Qur'ānic evidence, though, seems to make it clear that (1) Muḥammad's connexion to Abraham was made before he left Mecca, and (2) the notion of the primordial religion of Abraham already bore 'monotheistic connotations' in pre-Islamic times.

At the point where Muḥammad recognises both his spiritual lineage as well as the validity of unity in religion as opposed to schism, the Qur'ān instructs: 'Set thy face steadfastly towards the [one-ever-true] faith (*ḥanīf*), turning away from all that is false, in accordance with the natural disposition (*fiṭra*) which God has instilled into man' (Q. 30:30).[42] Regarding the term *ḥanīf*, Asad writes:

> The expression *ḥanīf* is derived from the verb *ḥanafa*, which literally means "he inclined [towards a right state or tendency]". Already in pre-Islamic times, this term had a definitely monotheistic connotation, and was used to describe a man who turned away from sin and worldliness and from all dubious beliefs.[43]

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[39] Rahman, 133.
[40] Ibid., 142-144.
[41] Watt, 204-205.
[42] Asad translation.
[43] Asad, p. 28, n. 110.

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That it is Abraham who is the *ḥanīf* exemplar, the 'arch-monotheist', is made clear at the end of the Meccan period (*sūrah* 6)[44] when Abraham is exemplified to the pagan Meccans for leaving behind the idolatrous faith of his ancestors: 'O my people! I am quit of what you associate [with God]; I have set my face as a *ḥanīf* unto Him who created the heavens and the earth and I am not one of those who associate [partners with God]' (Q. 6:78-79).[45] 'It is, then,' declares Rahman, 'in a solidly Meccan context with pagans as its addressees that the Qur'ān develops its image of Abraham as the super-prophet and arch-monotheist; and not in Madina as a consequence of controversies with the Jews.'[46] Finally, it is while still in Mecca that the Qur'ān states explicitly that Muḥammad is to follow the religion of Abraham:

> Those people who have split up their religion and become sects, you have nothing to do with them; their affair is up to God and He will tell them what they had been doing.... Say [O Muḥammad]: As for me, my Lord has guided me to a straight path, an upright religion, the religion of Abraham who was a straight monotheist [*ḥanīf*] and he was no associationist [or idolater] (Q. 6:160-161).[47]

Thus, Muḥammad's connexion to Abraham was established before his departure from Mecca, making it a solidly religious principle, not a political maneuver aimed to placate the Jews in Medina. This is contrary to the classic Orientalist argument, which implies that Muḥammad's emphasis on the primordial Abrahamic monotheism as the model for his own message was more a political survival tactic than a religious principle. The difference is significant: if the connexion to Abraham was a religious principle, then it would link Muḥammad and his message to the previously revealed religions, thereby legitimating them and opening the door for real religious pluralism.

We have already seen much evidence that the Qur'ān was sincere in its assertion that 'no distinction' is made between any of the prophets or their messages (Q. 3:83-84) and that

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[44] Ibid., p. 171: 'With the possible exception of two or three verses, the whole of this *sūrah* was revealed in one piece, towards the close of the Mecca period – almost certainly in the last year before the Prophet's exodus to Medina.'
[45] As cited in Rahman, 143.
[46] Ibid.
[47] As cited in ibid., 144.

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through Abraham, all previous religious communities were unified in essence with Muḥammad's community (Q. 2:135-137). However, there remains the issue of the expulsion and execution of certain Jewish tribes in Medina: is this 'break with the Jews' an indication of exclusivism or, worse, anti-Judaism? The answer, as we shall see presently, is strongly in the negative.

The entire concept of the 'break with the Jews', says Rahman, is exaggerated. 'There is,' he writes, 'no single special event or declaration or measure on the part of the Prophet or the Jews that can be taken as the unique referent of this hallowed phrase.'[48] Regardless, we shall take a closer look at the post-Badr relations between Muḥammad and the Jewish tribes by examining the expulsion of the Banū Qaynuqā' in 624 CE and the execution of the Banū Qurayẓah in 627 CE.

What incited these events, according to Watt, were personal attacks. He notes, at the end of his discussion on the matter, that 'the Jews had opposed Muḥammad to the utmost of their ability, and they had been utterly crushed.'[49] Karen Armstrong provides further historical context surrounding Muḥammad's actions toward the Jews; namely, that they had broken the treaty agreements in which they agreed not to act against Muḥammad and his community at Medina. 'The three Jewish tribes of Qaynuqah, Nadir and Qurayzah,' she writes, 'were determined to destroy Muhammad and all independently formed alliances with Mecca.'[50]

According to the Constitution of Medina, all the signatories of the document were to 'help against whoever suddenly attacks Yathrib' (article 44). Furthermore, article 37 stipulates that between the Jews and Muslims is 'sincere friendship, and honorable dealing, not treachery.' Thus, any acts of treason or treachery would have been a breach of contract.

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[48] Ibid., 148.
[49] Watt, 219.
[50] Armstrong, *Islam*, 20.

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Thus, 'when the Qaynuqah staged an unsuccessful rebellion against Muhammad in 625, they were expelled from Medina.'[51]

The events that led to the expulsion of the Banū Qaynuqā' began almost immediately after Muḥammad's return from Badr in 625. A few days after his return, an incident occurred in the market whereby some Banū Qaynuqā' Jews played a trick on an Arab woman; a passing Muslim regarded the act and the laughter as an insult and killed the responsible Jew, who was at once avenged by his fellows. 'Muḥammad regarded this as a *casus belli*,' writes Watt, 'and collected a force to besiege the clan.... They were forced to leave Medina, taking their wives and children with them.'[52]

Armstrong, in considering the same incident, offers the explanation that the Jewish tribes had already, before this event, become a security risk.[53] The Jewish tribes, she says, were 'horrified by Muhammad's new standing in Medina and saw Mecca as a natural ally.' Moreover, they 'had sizeable armies and impressive fighting power and, in the event of a Meccan attack, might well be persuaded to join the Quraysh to get rid of the upstart.'[54] She further explains that, during the siege, 'Qaynuqa had expected to lead a rebellion against Muhammad and the Emigrants,'[55] which would necessarily be in breach of the Constitution agreements. Finally, she notes that the Qaynuqā' would have not only expected the punishment they received, but that 'Muhammad would be well within his rights, according to the conventions of Arabia, to massacre the whole tribe.'[56]

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[51] Ibid. Expulsion, she notes, was the punishment that accorded with Arab custom of the time.
[52] Watt, 209.
[53] Armstrong, *Muhammad*, 183: 'If a Meccan army were to camp south of Medina, where the two most powerful tribes had their territory, the Jewish armies could easily join the Quraysh, whom they plainly regarded as allies. If the Quraysh attacked the city from the north, which would be their best option, the Jewish tribes could attack the Muslims from the rear so that they were completely surrounded.'
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid., 184.
[56] Ibid.

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Indeed, it was this latter punishment that was delivered upon the Qurayẓah in 627. During the siege of Medina in the same year, the Qurayẓah conspired with the Quraysh against Muḥammad. According to Watt: 'this clan had probably preserved neutrality so far as outward acts were concerned, but they had engaged in negotiations with Muḥammad's enemies, and, could they have trusted Quraysh and their bedouin allies, would have turned against Muḥammad.'[57] Such negotiations alone would have been a breach of their treaty of 'sincere friendship, and honorable dealing, not treachery.'[58] But, notes Armstrong, they went further: when the Qurayẓah 'saw the huge army that the Quraysh had brought to Medina filling the plain in front of the city to the horizon, Ka'b ibn Asad, chief of Qurayzah, agreed to help the Confederacy [of Abu Sufyan and the Quraysh].'[59] After the siege, the Qurayẓah returned to their fortress, where Muḥammad summoned his army. 'They knew,' writes Armstrong, 'that as unfaithful allies they could expect no mercy.'[60] Thus, after some debate and discussion, the decision was made to execute all the men of Qurayẓah and sell the women and children as slaves.

Both Watt and Armstrong insist that this action cannot be viewed out of its seventh-century Arabian context. In addition, Armstrong insists that the execution was the action of a primitive people, which she parallels to David's massacre of two hundred Philistines.[61] It seems difficult, though, to attribute the massacring of a treacherous former ally to a society's 'primitiveness', especially from the vantage of modern-day Western society, which itself has

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[57] Watt, 214.
[58] Armstrong, *Muhammad*, 205. It seems, though, that they denied having made any treaty with Muhammad: when Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh went to 'conduct an investigation in their territory [he] reported that the Jews seemed defiant: "Who is the Messenger of God?" they had asked. "There is no pact between us and Muhammad nor any agreement"' (loc. cit.).
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 206.
[61] Ibid., 208.

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indulged in colonialism-related genocides, two world wars, the bombing of Hiroshima, and the continued illegal and inhumane torture of war prisoners.[62]

To be certain, Muḥammad had been lenient twice before, with the Qaynuqā' and the Naḍīr, only to have to face the consequences: the Naḍīr, through their machinations in the siege of 627, almost destroyed Muḥammad's community. 'Some of them,' says Watt, 'continued to intrigue assiduously against Medina, and they played a considerable part in the formation of the great confederacy to besiege Medina in April 627.'[63] Therefore, for Muḥammad to let the Qurayẓah go with a proverbial slap on the wrist would have been tactically unsound, not 'primitive'. Despite all this, Muḥammad did, in fact, display leniency toward the Qurayẓah: he indulged their plea for mercy by allowing Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh (their chief Arab ally before the *hijra*) to decide their judgment, after consulting with other chiefs.[64]

The main point here, however, is to show that the expulsion and execution of certain Jewish tribes was not motivated by any sense of religious exclusivism. Indeed, these events, says Armstrong, 'did not indicate any hostility towards Jews in general, but only towards the three rebel tribes.'[65] She further states:

> The Qur'ān continued to revere Jewish prophets and to urge Muslims to respect the People of the Book. Smaller Jewish groups continued to live in Medina, and later Jews, like Christians, enjoyed full religious liberty in the Islamic empires.[66]

SUMMARY

The actions against the Jewish tribes from Medina were a result of irresolvable civic tensions and had no bearing on the Qur'ān's position on religious pluralism. The Qur'ān, as we have seen, legitimated diversity of religious practice and belief by connecting all revealed

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[62] Sajoo, *Muslim Ethics*, 50-51.
[63] Watt, 212.
[64] Armstrong, *Muhammad*, 207
[65] Armstrong, *Islam*, 21; Watt, 214-215.
[66] Armstrong, *Islam*, 21.

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religions in a common bond that went back to Abraham, and establishing righteousness, not allegiance to creed, as the basis for salvation.

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While it is true that the term 'pluralism' is a modern creation, it is also true that the Qur'ānic message is one that promotes an ethic of pluralism, and that the Prophet, aligning himself with the Qur'ān's vision for society, did implement pluralist policies. It is toward both these points that this present study has offered evidence.

Although some verses in the Qur'ān appear to promote violence, on closer inspection it becomes clear that the Qur'ān *limits*, not licenses, violence. The justification of violence or of exclusivism, as we have seen, is a symptom of politicking and denies the Qur'ān's actual message, which is one that stresses the peaceful, pluralistic interaction required for individual search.

This close relationship between exclusivism and politics (especially in modern times), is a complicated discussion that certainly lies beyond the scope of this present study. Nevertheless, we will address it here in brief for the sake of the reader, who may wonder at this juncture why – if the Qur'ān promotes pluralism – Islam is perceived as exclusivist today, and what can be done to recapture the Qur'ān's ethic of pluralism in order to effect positive change in the present day.

THE PATH TO PLURALISM

Despite its intertwining histories of pluralist ethos and praxis, Islam today is perceived often as violent and exclusivist.[1] That this conception is rampant is evidenced by the popularity of

[1] Bruce B. Lawrence writes: 'The Muslim enemy is invariably male, whether a foreign warrior conjured from the past or a potential terrorist stalking modern America ... Behind the hostile Muslim men, Americans imagine the faces of Muslim women, homebound creatures marked alike by seclusion from the outside

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such ideas as Samuel Huntington's 'violence-propensity' thesis, as well as the now-infamous stereotypic cartoons of the Prophet Muḥammad first published by *Jyllands-Posten* on 30 September 2005.[2] It is an image, however, whose perpetuation has been fostered by an international media that capitalizes on a general global ignorance of world histories as well as a Western obsession with the geopolitical goings-on of the Middle East.[3] Effectively, the culture and politics of that region have become confused with the religion of Islam, when, in fact, only fifteen per cent of Muslims are represented by its inhabitants. This, says Aga Khan IV, is a failure in education about pluralism. It is an unfortunate reality that the Western world has remained uneducated, not only about global cultures and societies (Muslim and Non), but also about global politico-economic histories, wherein lie the roots of modern exclusivist interpretations of Islam.

This is a history that finds its roots in the legacies of colonialism and the Cold War, which left whole societies in economic, political, and cultural tatters. Post-colonial Muslim societies, stifled by political oppression, were unable to restructure their economies to confront the new global order, which witnessed the ascendancy of the nation-state system and capitalism. Plausibly, then, did popular discontent find a voice, the most vocal of which arose from the mosque, the only place in Muslim societies secure from political trespass.[4] Thus, it was religious extremists and political zealots who, through the use of millions of petro-dollars, propagated in many countries a doctrine that blamed the West for their woeful situation. It helped little that their once-upon-a-time colonizers not only overtook the

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world and apparent oppression by their tyrannical husbands' (*Shattering the myth: Islam beyond violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 5).

[2] See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Jyllands-Posten-Muhammad-dr.png> for images of the cartoons.

[3] Lawrence (p. 5) writes: 'Whether it is Ayatollah Khomeini denouncing the United States as the Great Satan of the Egyptian Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman plotting to bomb the World Trade Center and other New York public buildings, Muslim leaders continue to be newsworthy principally for their adversarial words and deeds.'

[4] Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: illiberal democracy at home and abroad* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 149.

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political and cultural identities of these societies, but began playing many of them like pawns in a proverbial chess game of military might.

One wonders, now, how different reactions to issues in Kashmir or Afghanistan would have been had the key actors been better informed of the structural socio-economic problems at play.[5] The most important agent in creating space for change, then, is education – both about ourselves and about others. This sort of education would foster understanding in the industrialized world of the issues and cultures of the developing world. In developing societies, it would facilitate the actualization of self-sustainable change, of which the pivot is inter-group cooperation, the upshot of a pluralist society. By what traverse, though, are societies to engender pluralism instead of its dangerous contrary, conflict?

Amyn Sajoo details three important features that distinguish a positive transition: (1) a commitment to *civility*, the 'concern for the good of the entire society';[6] (2) the creative energy to *institutionalize* values into action; and (3) the readiness to enlarge social welfare, 'so that inclusion is genuine'.[7] A sense of civility inculcates a social conscience that prescribes dialogue as the solution to conflict and abjures violence as the 'ultimate denial of a civil ethos'.[8] By institutionalizing civic values into the justice system, the rule of law becomes a supporter of civic ethics rather than its repressor. Redressing large scale poverty is an essential precursor to inclusion. Economic inequity, and its attendant denial of liberties, is a scourge not limited to the developing world, as attest minority ghettos from Detroit to Manchester.

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[5] Address by His Highness the Aga Khan (6 September 2004), at the Annual Conference of German Ambassadors, Berlin: <http://www.akdn.org/speeches/21_Berlin06094.htm>.

[6] Edward Shils, 'The Virtue of Civil Society,' *Government and Opposition* 26:1 (Winter, 1991), 11. Civility, Shils explains, means 'regarding other persons, including one's adversaries, as members of the same society, even though they belong to different parties or to different religious communities or to different ethnic groups' (13).

[7] Sajoo, 'Civil Imagination,' 39.

[8] Ibid.

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How, though, is this contemplation to be rendered into action? 'What,' asks Sajoo, 'turns normative values into lived experience?'[9] Here, Sajoo, like McGill University's Charles Taylor,[10] emphasizes the crucial role played by educators, writers, artists, and public intellectuals in shaping the public worldview, which in turn affects public actions. 'Shared public images,' writes Sajoo, 'lie behind how we understand ideas like "democracy," "justice" and "religion" - *and act accordingly.*'[11] It is these images that compose our *social imaginaries*: 'the way in which we picture the world we inhabit.'[12] In his article on 'Civil Imagination after September 11, 2001', Sajoo writes:

> Social imaginaries know no borders. They are local and global, drawing on traditions in which cherished values come alive. Attar, Rumi and Ibn Tufayl knew this, as did the musicians, painters and traders who trekked the transcultural pathways of the medieval Silk Road. Among their creative heirs today are Saadi Youssef and Naguib Mahfouz, Abbas Kiarostami and Samira Makhmalbaf, Khaled Hosseini and M.G. Vassanji, all of whom sculpt the landscapes of our minds and influence the way we see the world. This civil imagination is where an ethos of pluralism ultimately takes root, against the dire tides of chauvinism.[13]

It is in the public sphere, then, where pluralism takes root. The Britain-based political scientist Bhiku Parekh advances (after Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls) the notion of a society of individuals with a common affiliation to common citizenship:

> In this view, a political community is a voluntary association of free and equal citizens held together by principles of justice as embodied in the structure of public authority and a regime of rights and obligations.[14]

This is not aimed at conflating diversity, but rather at strengthening bonds between diverse groups: a society's cohesion is threatened by the coexistence of strong group-identities with weak common identities. 'Strong multicultural identities are a good thing,' says Bristol University sociologist Tariq Modood, 'but they need a framework of vibrant, dynamic,

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[9] Ibid., 39.
[10] Taylor is a Canadian public intellectual and McGill University philosophy professor. Among his most notable works are: *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); and *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).
[11] Sajoo, 'Civil Imagination,' 39.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 40.
[14] Bhiku Parekh, 'British Commitments,' *Prospect* 114 (September 2005).

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national narratives and the ceremonies and rituals which give expression to our common citizenship.'[15]

Still, this cannot be a solely legal endeavor. As admits Parekh, the law 'cannot compel a passenger not to leave her seat or mumble abuses when an immigrant of a different colour sits next to her, or require a bank clerk not to keep an immigrant waiting for an unduly long period of time.'[16] The law cannot eliminate discrimination by formalising equality. It cannot inspire quotidian kindnesses or metaphysical notions of common humanity. It cannot motivate people to conquer indigence, which is one of the most serious undercurrents of civic tension. Only a lived ethics of engagement can.

Where theory meets practice is in the many social initiatives undertaken all across the Muslim world (of which one example is the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh).[17] Sustainable and inclusive social development is essential to creating the necessary space for the inter-human engagement that would cultivate cooperative coexistence. According to University of Michigan political scientist Ashutosh Varshney: 'Forms of engagement, if robust, promote peace: contrariwise, their absence or weakness opens up space for ethnic violence.'[18] Aga Khan IV, the founder of the world's largest private development network (Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)), identified three pre-conditions for the successful transition of underdeveloped countries into peaceful and productive societies: (1) stable and competent

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[15] Tariq Modood, 'Remaking multiculturalism after 7/7,' *openDemocracy* (29 September 2005). <http://www.opendemocracy.net/debates/article.jsp?id=2&debateId=124&articleId=2879>.

[16] Parekh.

[17] 'Grameen Bank provides credit to the poorest of the poor in rural Bangladesh, without any collateral. At Grameen Bank, credit is a cost effective weapon to fight poverty and it serves as a catalyst in the over all development of socio-economic conditions of the poor who have been kept outside the banking orbit on the ground that they are poor and hence not bankable' (<http://www.grameen-info.org/bank/index.html>).

[18] Varshney, 'Ethnic Conflict,' 363. He further writes: 'Countervailing forces are created when organizations such as trade unions, associations of businessmen, traders, teachers, doctors and lawyers, and at least some cadre-based political parties (different from the ones that have an interest in communal polarization) are communally integrated. [...] Civic organizations, for all practical purposes, become the ears and arms of the administration. A synergy emerges between the local wings of the state and local civic organizations, making it easier to police the emerging situation and preventing it from degenerating into riots and killings.... In the end, polarizing politicians either do not succeed or eventually give up trying to provoke and engineer communal violence' (ibid., 378).

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democratic governance; (2) an environment that respects and encourages pluralism; and (3) a diverse and engaged civil society.[19] He offers an example of how responsible and indigenous social development can create an environment conducive to stability, prosperity, and knowledge:

> Northern Pakistan is an excellent example of how this support for civil society and pluralism can buttress democracy. We have been working in that isolated region for more than 20 years, and with German participation since 1992. Some 3,900 village-based organisations have been created, dealing with a range of issues from women's initiatives, to water usage, to savings and credit. Economic growth has been impressive and hostilities born out of despair have been replaced by co-operation and hope for the future. In recent local elections, many of the leaders of these village-based organisations sought and achieved elected positions. The lesson here is that democracy can work even in the most remote rural areas, which is where much of our vital work is concentrated, if one is patient and works to build up indigenous capacity.[20]

That this sort of initiative can succeed in Muslim countries is also indicated by the AKDN's mandate, which takes its own impetus from the Qur'ānic ethos to 'realize the social conscience of Islam through social action': 'The central emphasis of Islam's ethical ideal is enablement of each person to live up to his exalted status as vicegerent of God on earth.'[21]

Concluding Remarks

At the core of the pluralist endeavor are inter-human relationships. It is this strength that the Qur'ān aimed to capture in its vision of an ethical community of diverse and different individuals who strive to ennoble both themselves and society through the search for knowledge as well as effective social action. By directing humans to 'know one another', the Scripture strongly affirms pluralism: coexistence and cooperation are mandatory for humanity's diverse communities, who are to compete with one another only in 'good works'.

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[19] Aga Khan, Address at the Annual Conference of German Ambassadors.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Excerpt from the AKDN Mandate, found in: The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 'Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN): An Ethical Framework,' 2000:
<http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=101094>.

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An understanding of humanity as cooperative and contemplative, however, is not had by societies accidentally. Rather, it must be promoted purposefully by those who are aware of its necessity to the survival of humans and humanity. This need has perhaps never been more poignant: the global societies of our present times have experienced the effects of globalization in ways both splendid and tragic. Part and parcel of this new world of rapidly converging civilizations is increasing interaction; misunderstanding and its oft-attendant, violence, can only be spurned through discourse that seeks to understand the 'other'. Dialogue, the enemy of misunderstanding, is crucial to ending violence and its spurs, most notably civic imbalance. Furthermore, it is only through civic discourse that each society will be able to decide for itself which values it holds dear and which values it considers outmoded; in this way can the relativist trap of allowing all values be escaped. Indeed, modern Western society has undergone much re-evaluation in recent years; Canada, for example, has legalized same-sex marriage and banned smoking in public places, thereby establishing a new normative which would have been unimaginable not even a decade ago.

Still, it should perhaps be expected that states that promote anti-pluralist policies, such as banning sartorial expressions of religion or endorsing racial stereotyping, should be inhabited by citizens in whom that zealous attitude is mirrored. Thus, if Western states desire a populace immune to violent political influences, then it falls on them to educate better their citizens in histories that take into account the intentions and fallouts of unfortunate legacies such as colonialism and the Iraq saga, as well as to understand better the contours and ethics of the world's varied and various civilizations, of which Muslim societies compose a great part. The study of pluralism and its ways and means thus becomes imperative. This is an exercise that Canada, above other nations, has made tangible through its commitment to the Global Centre for Pluralism in Ottawa.

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The most potent crisis of our times, then, is the lack of knowledge that permeates so sadly our global populace. It is this same lack of knowledge that perpetuates the infamous and dangerous media stereotype that portrays so much violence as 'Islamic' without referring well to its actual nationalistic or economic origins. To ameliorate the fear and misunderstanding that spurs such violence – which is not restricted to Muslims or the Muslim world – it is essential to understand better the malaises that afflict our neighbors. It is by knowing the landscape of our varied human journeys that we may direct effectively our futures towards that globally cooperative society that prizes the ethic of shared civic space, which today is not only desired for human peace but has become necessary for human survival.

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APPENDIX
THE CONSTITUTION OF MEDINA[22]

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

This is a writing of Muḥammad the prophet between the believers and Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib and those who follow them and are attached to them and who crusade (*jāhadū*) along with them.

1. They are a single community (*ummah*) distinct from (other) people.

2. The Emigrants of Quraysh, according to their former condition, pay jointly the blood-money between them, and they (as a group) ransom their captive(s), (doing so) with uprightness and justice between the believers.

3. Banū 'Awf, according to their former condition, pay jointly the previous blood-wits, and each sub-clan (*ṭā'ifah*) ransoms its captive(s), (doing so) with uprightness and justice between the believers.

4. Banū 'l-Ḥārith, according to their former condition, pay jointly ... (as 3).

5. Banū Sā'idah ... (as 3).

6. Banū Jusham ... (as 3).

7. Banū 'n-Najjār ... (as 3).

8. Banū 'Amr b. 'Awf ... (as 3).

9. Banū 'n-Nabīt ... (as 3).

10. Banū 'l-Aws ... (as 3).

11. The believers do not forsake a debtor among the, but give him (help), according to what is fair, for ransom or blood-wit.

12. A believer does not take as confederate (*ḥalīf*) the client (*mawlā*) of a believer without his (the latter's) consent.

13. The God-fearing believers are against whoever of them acts wrongfully or seeks (? plans) an act that is unjust or treacherous or hostile or corrupt among the believers; their hands are all against him, even if he is the son of one of them.

[22] As cited in Watt, 221-5.

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14. A believer does not kill a believer because of an unbeliever, and does not help an unbeliever against an unbeliever.
15. The security (*dhimmah*) of God is one; the granting of 'neighbourly protection' (*yujīr*) by the least of them (the believers) is binding on them; the believers are patrons (or clients – *mawālī*) of one another to the exclusion of (other) people.

16. Whoever of the Jews follows us has the (same) help and support (*naṣr, iswah*) (as the believers), so long as they are not wronged (by him) and he does not help (others) against them.

17. The peace (*silm*) of the believers is one; no believer makes peace apart from another believer, where there is fighting in the way of God, except in so far as equality and justice between them (is maintained).

18. In every expedition made with us the parties take turns with one another.

19. The believers exact vengeance for one another where a man gives his blood in the way of God. The God-fearing believers are under the best and most correct guidance.

20. No idolater (*mushrik*) gives 'neighbourly protection' (*yujīr*) for goods or person to Quraysh, nor intervenes in his (a Qurayshī's) favour against a believer.

21. When anyone wrongfully kills a believer, the evidence being clear, then he is liable to be killed in retaliation for him, unless the representative of the murdered man is satisfied (with a payment). The believers are against him (the murderer) entirely; nothing is permissible to them except to oppose him.

22. It is not permissible for a believer who has agreed to what is in this document (*ṣaḥīfah*) and believed in God and the last day to help a wrong-doer or give him lodging. If anyone helps him or gives him lodging, then upon this man is the curse of God and His wrath on the day of resurrection.

23. Wherever there is anything about which you differ, it is to be referred to God and to Muḥammad (peace be upon him).

24. The Jews bear expenses along with the believers so long as they continue at war.

25. The Jews of Banū 'Awf are a community (*ummah*) along with the believers. To the Jews their religion (*dīn*) and to the Muslims their religion. (This applies) both to their clients and to themselves, with the exception of anyone who has done wrong or acted treacherously; he brings evil only on himself and on his household.

26. For the Jews of Banū 'n-Najjār the like of what is for the Jews of Banū 'Awf.

27. For the Jews of Banū 'l-Ḥārith the like ...

28. For the Jews of Banū Sā'idah the like ...

29. For the Jews of Banū Jusham the like ...

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30. For the Jews of Banū 'l-Aws the like ...

31. For the Jews of Banū Tha'labah the like of what is for the Jews of Banū 'Awf, with the exception of anyone who has done wrong or acted treacherously; he brings evil only on himself and his household.

32. Jafnah, a subdivision (*baṭn*) of Tha'labah, are like them.

33. For Banū 'sh-Shuṭaybah the like of what is for the Jews of Banū 'Awf; honourable dealing (comes) before treachery.

34. The clients of Tha'labah are like them.

35. The *biṭānah* of (particular) Jews are as themselves.

36. No one of them (? those belonging to the *ummah*) may go out (to war) without the permission of Muḥammad (peace be upon him), but he is not restrained from taking vengeance for wounds. Whoever acts rashly (*fataka*), it (involves) only himself and his household, except where a man has been wronged. God is the truest (fulfiller) of this (document).

37. It is for the Jews to bear their expenses and the Muslims to bear their expenses. Between them (that is, to one another) there is help (*naṣr*) against whoever wars against the people of this document. Between them is sincere friendship (*naṣ'ḥ wa-naṣīhah*), and honourable dealing, not treachery. A man is not guilty of treachery through (the act of) his confederate. There is help for (or, help is to be given to) the person wronged.

38. The Jews bear expenses along with the believers so long as they continue at war.

39. The valley of Yathrib is sacred for the people of this document.

40. The 'protected neighbour' (*jār*) is as the man himself so long as he does no harm and does not act treacherously.

41. No woman is given 'neighbourly protection' (*tujār*) without the consent of her people.

42. Whenever among the people of this document there occurs any incident (disturbance) or quarrel from which disaster for it (the people) is to be feared, it is to be referred to God and to Muḥammad, the Messenger of God (God bless and preserve him). God is the most scrupulous and truest (fulfiller) of what is in this document.

43. No 'neighbourly protection' is given (*lā tujār*) to Quraysh and those who help them.

44. Between them (? the people of this document) is help against whoever suddenly attacks Yathrib.

45. Whenever they are summoned to conclude and accept a treaty, they conclude and accept it; when they in turn summon to the like of that, it is for them upon the believers, except

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whoever wars about religion; for (? = incumbent on) each man is his share from their side which is towards them.

46. The Jews of al-Aws, both their clients and themselves, are in the same position as belongs to the people of this document while they are thoroughly honourable in their dealings with the people of this document. Honourable dealing (comes) before treachery.

47. A person acquiring (? guilt) acquires it only against himself. God is the most upright and truest (fulfiller) of what is in this document. This writing does not intervene to protect a wrong-doer or traitor. He who goes out is safe, and he who sits still is safe in Medina, ecept whoever does wrong and acts treacherously. God is 'protecting neighbour' (*jār*) of him who acts honourably and fears God, and Muḥammad is the Messenger of God (God bless and preserve him).

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